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## The Prophet and his polity

Martin Hinds

MALISE RUTHVEN  
*Islam in the World*  
400pp. Penguin. Paperback, £3.95.  
0140223568

That Islam has become a political force in the modern world is obvious enough. That there is no general book in English focusing on how this came to be so is something which Malise Ruthven seeks to rectify. Specialists in the subject may feel a *frisson* of excitement: is this not the book that can be recommended to all those acquaintances and chance enquirers who want to know what the "best" book is? The answer is a slightly qualified "yes".

It all began in western Arabia early in the seventh century, with the emergence of an Arab prophet called Muhammad. This in itself was not particularly unusual: in Late Antiquity there was no shortage of holy men in what we now call the Middle East, as Peter Brown has shown. What was unusual was that this prophet succeeded in attitudinal among the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula a sense of ethnic unity which was underpinned by an Abrahamic monotheistic religion of their own. This unity made possible, and was subsequently sustained by, the Arab conquests.

Two questions of particular importance immediately arise. First, what triggered this movement off? Ruthven gives us the current conventional wisdom on the matter, for which he is indebted above all to W. M. Watt. In a nutshell, this says that the society of beduin traders of Mecca in the late sixth century was being transformed into one of merchant capitalists as they strengthened their hold on "the long-distance trade in such luxury commodities as slaves and spices". This transformation brought with it an imbalance in the organization of tribal life in Meccan society "where something approaching class divisions had begun to appear". There was an erosion of "tribal humanism" and "a harsher, more individualistic society was coming into existence". Muhammad's preaching, we are told, constituted a response to this state of affairs. Denied success in Mecca, he established himself further north in Medina (the Hijra or "migration" of 622) and in due course took over Mecca and the rest of Arabia. The summary is ably done, but this explanation is unlikely to find a place in tomorrow's textbook: it can be noted that it has already been disregarded by Michael Cook in *Muhammad* (1983), which presumably appeared too late to be consulted by Ruthven.

The second question relates to the nature of the Arab-Islamic polity which came into existence, in the first instance at Medina. Here, by contrast, Ruthven gets it absolutely right:

From the historical viewpoint, the polity created by the Prophet at Medina represented the germ of a system rather than a fully realized ideal. Compared with the flowering of Islamic civilization that would occur in the great river-valleys, it was a rudimentary and primitive society. During the Prophet's lifetime, the model was incomplete and far from monolithic. Many Muslims took back on the Medinese polity during the time of the Prophet and his immediate successors as a sort of desert utopia, where a state of perfection had been reached which could never be achieved by subsequent generations, like the Garden of Eden before the fall. Historically this view is nonsense.

Or, to put it more mildly, there are historiographical problems. The question of how to distinguish between early Islamic history and early Islamic meta-history has received a fair amount of scholarly attention in recent years and it is clear that it was above all in nineteenth-century Iraq, notably at Baghdad, that religious scholars compiled the accounts available to us of the doings of early Muslims. Where modern scholars part company is in respect of the extent to which those sources tell us more about their compilers than they do about early Islamic history. There are, in addition, differences of opinion about the Qur'an: as against the conventional Muslim view that its text took the form in which we now have it about twenty years after the Prophet's death in 632, two western scholars have within the last ten years advanced variously the views (a) that it did not assume that form until perhaps as much as two hundred years after the Prophet (a view known to

time of the Prophet (a view not mentioned by Ruthven).

The evidence supporting these views need not detain us here, but it is important to note that the issue is in each case intimately bound up with the kind of Islamic law that was in the making fairly early in the ninth century. At that time, both the Qur'an and, crucially, Prophetic practice were formally acknowledged as sources of law. Earlier Islamic law-making appears to have been concerned with establishing and maintaining laws which were in line with the available holy scripture, generally agreed normative practice (*sunna*), and the dictates of straightforward common sense. A revisionist view (not yet published) holds that the Umayyad caliphs (661-750, based in Syria) themselves occupied a central position in the making of law. But this is very much played

God's law. The point is well taken by Ruthven when he says:

The distinctive character of Islam, as compared with that of Christianity, lies less in the fusion of religion and politics (which also occurred in the West) than in the fact that the division between the religious and the secular occurs at a different point, between the legal and political realms. Whereas Christianity inherited a body of secular law developed under the pagan Romans, Islam developed a system of religious law more or less independently of the political sphere.

The counterpart of a Prophetic *sunna* that was fixed in the past was a Qur'an that was also fixed - God's eternal and immutable speech. This was the position taken by the ninth-century, urban (above all Baghdad), anti-intellectual proponents of Prophetic *hadith*; and it was no accident that their intellectualizing opponents (notably the caliph al-Ma'mun and the



The *muqarnas* ceiling of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the restoration of which received one of the first Aga Khan Awards for Architecture. This, and other award-winners, are discussed and illustrated in *Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic world today*, edited by Renato Holod and Darl Rastorfer (255pp. New York: Aperture; distributed by Phaidon. £37.50; paperback, £18.50. 089281 123 8).

down by the conventional wisdom, which instead focuses on the so-called "ancient schools" of law (Kufan, Basran, Medinan and Syrian), consisting of scholar-jurists who probably had no official status and for whom *sunna* simply meant good local practice. It was only in the ninth century, by which time the Abbasids held the caliphate at Baghdad, that scholar-jurists began to elaborate what was to become the so-called "classical theory" of Islamic law; and the crucial point in that theory was that *sunna*/normative practice, as a source of law, was thenceforward regarded as uniquely and wholly the *sunna* of the Prophet, as documented in the tradition (*hadith*) literature of his actions and sayings.

This was the most important single development in the shaping of Sunni Islam. For one thing, normative practices of the present were replaced by what had now to be represented as normative practice in the past; it was moreover the normative practice of a single individual, and one located in the backwater of Medina at that. The Prophet in his idealized, pristine Medina was now viewed, as Marshall Hodgson put it, not simply as the deliverer of the Qur'an, but also as its interpreter; and his alleged actions and sayings were now as much a source of law as the Qur'an itself was. For another thing, it was a development which clearly marked just how circumscribed the law-making role of the caliph was; it was not for him to determine for legal purposes what his normative practice was or should be, since such normative practice was that of the Prophet. To be sure, the caliph could use his functional authority in order to mete out punishment; but he could not (or could no longer, according to

Mu'tazilis) held to the proposition that the Qur'an was created, and therefore by clear inference was less than eternal and immutable. (In the ensuing showdown, it was of course the proponents of *hadith* who won through and an Abbasid caliph who had to back down.) As Ruthven (and before him W. Cantwell Smith) points out, we can see from this that Islamic arguments about the nature of the Qur'an are paralleled by Christian arguments about the nature of the person of Christ; and indeed Smith, while noting that the analogy is not perfect, went a stage further by noting that "what corresponds in the Islamic scheme to the Bible (the record of revelation) is the Tradition (*hadith*)". It is this focus on a book in Arabic as the manifestation of God, rather than on a person, that accounts for much that is characteristically Islamic; and "the Quranic commentators fulfilled the function which Christianity reserved for religious painters".

Just as the inability of the Abbasid caliphs to hold on to temporal power issued in a proliferation in the Middle East of power-centres which were at best only nominally loyal to them, so the limited character of their effective religious leadership showed itself in a proliferation of sectarian attitudes. These attitudes, in addition to their doctrinal, theological, legal and other colourings, were located at various points on (to use a phrase of Ruthven's) "the spectrum of activity which ranges from passive acquiescence to militant activism". Since Islam had been, from the beginning, "programmed for victory" (as he puts it), and since the victory had resulted in Arab control of a substantial part of the known world, it is hardly surprising that sectarianism and schism within the polity

erings of the kind familiar to students of Christianity in the early Byzantine Empire and involved militant activity and armed conflict from an early stage. Thus already in the seventh century hard-line puritan opponents of any form of governmental control had emerged as Kharijites, while partisans of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and various descendants of his had emerged as Shi'as. The Kharijites were too extreme and peripheral to survive in any significant form, however, though the Khariji model of extreme militancy none the less surfaced from time to time; it was left to various casts of Shi'ism to provide the main sectarian alternatives to the Sunni Islam which took shape from the ninth century onwards.

Of the three most important types of Shi'ism, one was for a time dangerous, one went quietist, and one withdrew to the backlands. The dangerous version, Isma'ilism, started off in the ninth century with the greatest amount of messianic immediacy, in expectation of the imminent return of an eighth-century descendant of Ali's, Muhammad b. Isma'il. Some Isma'ilis caused a fair amount of havoc in the Fertile Crescent and Arabia in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, while others went on to set up the Fatimid dynasty, which was based at first in North Africa and subsequently in Egypt. In time Fatimid dynastic requirements brought about some loss of messianic immediacy, and the Fatimid and later Isma'ili Imams, endowed with God-given infallibility, ruled their communities on Muhammad b. Isma'il's behalf. The Fatimid threat to Sunni domains came in the tenth and eleventh centuries, while in the early twelfth century it was the turn of the Isma'ili Assassins to frighten the wits out of the population of Iraq and western Iran; but that threat disappeared in the course of the twelfth century.

Neither of the two other types of Shi'ism was anything like as menacing. The Imami Shi'is, who were above all to be found at Baghdad during the formative period of their persuasion, were faced with the problem of living under a Sunni régime which they did not recognize as legitimate and which frequently incarcerated, and occasionally did away with, their Imams. They coped with this by adopting dissimulation as a religious duty and then, in the late ninth century, by occulting their twelfth Imam. This latter stratagem neatly dealt with the matter of their divinely appointed leader: the infallible Imam remained alive - with the result that no one else could claim to be Imam - but would be inaccessible (save by God's grace) until the end of time. Thus it was left to Imami religious scholars to function as best they could on the Imam's behalf until he reappeared (it is this form of Shi'ism that has prevailed in Iran since the sixteenth century). On the other hand, the Zaydi Shi'is stemmed from a militant tradition of Aliid loyalism not given to the compromising of principles and therefore not geared up to life under non-Zaydi rulers. They accordingly set up their Imamates in remote places - in the mountains south of the Caucasia (until the twelfth century) and in the Yemen (until the 1960s).

While the focal point in Shi'ism was the charismatic figure of the Imam, the same cannot be said of the Caliph in the Sunni Islam which was taking shape. The concomitant of the erosion of the caliph's temporal and religious power was an increase in the power of military leaders and religious scholars (*ulama*) respectively, with the caliphate becoming in effect the property of the latter. There continued to be Abbasid caliphs at Baghdad until the middle of the thirteenth century, but these caliphs functioned primarily as symbols of the religious unity of the Sunal community, rather than as figures exercising any religious powers. In this "divine democracy" it was the *ulama* who were the guardians and expounders of the divine law, and it was the task of the military leaders to maintain an environment in which a good Muslim life could be led. The Sunni caliphate could, and in due course did, become redundant.

What was the nature of this "divine democracy"? Ruthven's view is that "if one could sum up in a phrase the essential difference between the two great monotheisms, one might say that whereas Christianity is primarily

John Coatsworth



of justice" (p 227 and, in mangled form, on the back cover). But this is to stretch the sense of "justice" too far. The God of the Quran is an austere and unloving deity with a marked penchant for making decrees and requiring obedience; and His law, the *Shari'a*, as elaborated by the scholar-jurists, is concerned with spelling out what may and may not be done in every conceivable situation. Thus it goes so far as to lay down that the ritual ablutions required after legitimate intercourse in marriage may be dispensed with after unnatural acts with animals, corpses and "such children as are not normally susceptible to penetration". The overriding concern is with establishing what God requires of every individual by way of right behaviour, not with establishing just relations between men: Islam may thus rather be said to be "above all the religion of orthopraxis".

Understandably enough, total preoccupation with the right behaviour required in this life by a distant but demanding God in preparation for the life to come struck some Muslims as a cheerless and one-sided business. In spite of opposition on the part of *uḥmān*, Sufi brotherhoods emerged as popular movements from the thirteenth century onwards and constituted, along with the schools of law, the main forms of association in the pre-modern Muslim world. Through the brotherhoods the austere and distant God of the *uḥmān* was given more immediacy, the *shaykhs* of the brotherhoods represented an alternative spiritual leadership to that of the *uḥmān*, their hierarchical organization permitted individual Sufis to give some structure to their lives, and their gatherings and rituals provided a sense of fellowship.

## A look beneath the hump

Robert Irwin

R. T. WILSON  
The Camel  
223pp, Longman, £25.  
0 582 7512 4

In *Das Kamel* (1855) Josef von Hammer-Purgstall estimated that there were 6,000 camel-related words in the classical Arabic language. In making this estimate (certainly an underestimate) von Hammer-Purgstall drew on classic works of Arabic literature, poetry and treatises on lexicography, zoology and cosmography generally. Detailed discussion of the camel—its breeds, management and diseases—seems to be rare in classical Arabic literature and does not compare with the farriery and veterinary literature on the horse. Even in general manuals on zoology and cosmography the camel does not normally receive more attention than the elephant, the bat or the werewolf. While there has been a spate of books in recent years on falcons and sea-shells aimed at sales in the Arabian Peninsula, even now there does not seem to be any corresponding demand for or supply of books on camels in the Near East.

Moreover the Sufi orders in due course played an important role both in spreading Islam further afield and in reforming Islam from within; the activities of the Naqshbandi order in Central Asia, India and the Far East from the eighteenth century onwards, which are described by Ruthven in some detail, can be noted in particular.

But by this stage the religion that was "programmed for victory" was running into difficulties. There was foreign encroachment on its soil and an influx of alien influences. Ruthven identifies four main types of response to this state of affairs (and rightly eschews the catch-all term "fundamentalism"): archaic, modernist, reformist, and neo-traditionalist. The archaic response typically followed the Hijra and Holy War pattern of pristine Medina and was enacted in a backlands setting, the Mahdist movement in the Sudan being the most obvious example. The modernists sought to bring what they could of the Islamic heritage into line with the modern world and drop the rest: thus the nineteenth-century Indian Anglophile Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan wanted in effect to abandon the *Shari'a* in its received form. The reformists wanted to strengthen Islam from within while at the same time doing what they could to render it compatible with the modern world: thus Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers, focused on the example of the earliest Muslims in an attempt to make the *Shari'a* more manageable. As for the neo-traditionalists, theirs is the stance of no compromise: this was the style of the Sunai Maududi in Pakistan, and it is that of the Hanbali Sunni religious establishment in Saudi Arabia.

Modern researchers therefore have found little in Arabic to make use of, and until very recently, Westerners interested in the physiology or the handling of the camel were obliged to rely mainly on books produced by officers and doctors of the English, French and Italian colonial administrations in Africa and India. Veteran *méharistes* (members of the French North African camel corps) in particular produced an extensive, if rather unsystematic literature on all aspects of the one-humped camel. Until recently the standard work in English on what is commonly if inaccurately known as the dromedary was *A Treatise on the One-humped Camel in Health and Disease* by A. S. Leese (1927). This was really a vet's book and based mainly on the author's work for the Indian government on camel diseases in northern India. Later on, in retirement, Leese was to interest himself in such topics as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and currency reform and he came to view the "New Menace" as the political equivalent of trypanosomiasis (the major health threat to camels): he went on to produce such curious works as *Out of Step: Events in the Two Lives of an Anti-Jewish Camel-Doctor* (1951) and *The Legated Cruelty of Schieffelin: the Jewish Method of Cattle Slaughter* (nd).

Leese's veterinary findings on the camel are still much quoted today, but happily research has moved on in recent decades. In particular, researches carried out by K. Schmidt-Nielsen in north-west Africa in 1952 into the camel's physiology and, specifically, into the way in which it stores its water have stimulated further scientific research in North Africa, Australia, Israel, Egypt, Russia and elsewhere. A second promising area of research was opened up in 1975 by the appearance of Richard Bulliet's original and stimulating book *The Camel and the Wheel*. Bulliet studied the prehistory of the camel and its history in human society. He sketched out a hypothetical and still controversial chronology for the domestication of the camel and went on to argue that early reliance on the camel had massive implications for Islamic society, influencing its trade patterns, its relative neglect of wheeled transport and the lay-out of its cities.

Trevor Wilson works for the International Livestock Centre for Africa. His new book, *The Camel*, has made use of all these researches and he has of course added findings of his own and, in doing so, he has produced the first systematic treatise on the one-humped camel to be published in Britain. Although Wilson's

and the Imami Shi'i Khomeini in Iran.

In his conclusion, Ruthven remarks that, "Freed from the Pharaonic rigidity which makes so much contemporary Islamic activity seem culturally sterile . . . Islam could prove a highly congenial faith for a scientific age and one with an important message". He has in mind some form of universalist high Sufism, and a "message that proclaims the Eternal Transcendent, and man's special responsibility as guardian of this planet". A far cry indeed. What we see in the Muslim world at the moment is a steady reassertion of historically entrenched Islamic ways of doing things. The traditional Sunni alliance between holders of temporal power and *uḥmān* can be seen in Saudi Arabia, in Pakistan, and now even in the Sudan; Iran resembles the Imami ghetto of Abbasid Baghdad writ large but without the dissimulation of old, and thus no longer quietist, with the mujtahids acting, as ever, on behalf of the Hidden Imam; and, although he has not declared himself one yet, Colonel Qaddafi would make quite a passable Khariji leader. In the Sunni case in particular the only really tenable position is one of holding to the *Shari'a* in toto. Basically Sunni Islam is the *Shari'a*: to shed bits of it is to run the risk of losing all of it. The crucial issue is the extent to which it can be re-interpreted, and by whom. In pre-modern times there was a widespread Sunni belief that the point had been reached where there was no need for further legal rulings arrived at by creative interpretation (*ijtihad*). This belief has, of necessity, had to go by the board, as Maududi recognized and as Ruthven points out: For Maududi, Islam is perfect and needs no justification.

is the first really worthwhile book on the camel to be published here, it is not the only such book in the English language. Sadly there seems to have been a considerable gap between the completion of the text and the appearance of the book in print. For example the most recent *Food and Agriculture Organization Production Yearbook* figures he gives for camel populations in different parts of the world are from 1978: the figures for 1982 are available at time of review. More significantly perhaps, though Wilson has made use of Hilde Gauthier-Pilters' many articles on the camel in its natural environment, he has not been able to take account of *The Camel, Its Evolution, Ecology, Behaviour and Relationship to Man* by Gauthier-Pilters and Anne Innis Dagg (published by the University of Chicago Press in 1981).

Both books aim at a fairly systematic coverage of the one-humped camel, including such topics as its evolution, its importance in Islamic history, its employment in more recent times in America, Australia and elsewhere, and loading and saddling techniques, etc. Though the books overlap to some extent, they also complement one another rather neatly. Gauthier-Pilters and Dagg use their fieldwork to co-ordinate on the gait, feeding habits and behavioural patterns of the camel, while Wilson is stronger on the anatomy, physiology and pathology. Wilson also gives advice on what to look for when hiring a camel and on how to spread the loads in a camel train—useful tips for the novice desert explorer.

In the course of *The Camel* many misconceptions which are the stuff of saloon-bar arguments are set right. It is not true that the camel stores water in its hump: fat is stored there. Nor does it store water in the stomach. (Leese had earlier pointed out that any desperate desert traveller hoping to find water by slitting open the camel's stomach would certainly lose more than he gained from the emetic effects of the fluid thus consumed.) It is not true that camels need human assistance in order to breed (plainly not; or how could there be feral camels in Australia today?) and, though the camel is reticent, its powerful protractor muscles absolve it from the difficult feat of retroculation—pace Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* where it is stated that "All that urine backward do copulate backward . . . elution, or averily as Lions, Hares, Linxes". Scientific errors are set right too. For a long time it was widely believed that the one-humped camel and the bactrian were in

the strict sense separate species—that is that hybrids were not possible. When this was shown to be false it was then argued that such hybrids were infertile. This is not true either, and research on interbreeding continues in the Soviet Union where there is a relatively large population of bactrians. Wilson's book shows how much work remains to be done. In particular the taxonomy of camel breeds is still chaotic, with no consensus about whether to classify them by habitat, tribal ownership, use, colour or build.

The matter of the camel is neither anecdotal nor trivial. Food and Agriculture Organization figures show that in recent years the world's camel population has actually increased. For instance there are more camels today in Saudi Arabia, the Yemen Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates than there were in 1976. To some extent, perhaps, this increase is a product of a still continuing recovery from the great Middle Eastern drought of 1956-72; to some extent, perhaps, it is the product of princely prestige herds and of a more widespread insurance against uncertain political and economic future in the Near East. But, though the camel continues to function as the cartoonist's stereotype marker for the Arab lands, the equivalent of the Eiffel Tower and the beret for France, the real importance of the camel, now and in the future, is in Africa, particularly in the countries currently stricken by drought. In Somalia, Ethiopia and elsewhere camel populations also seem to have increased. There are approximately five times as many camels in Somalia as in Saudi Arabia. Though camels are still used to transport salt in the Sahara, it is the nutritional value of the camel that has attracted the attention of researchers. Both Gauthier-Pilters and Wilson believe that the camel's peculiar taste in plants and its habit of browsing widely are ecologically beneficial if not actually beneficial to the environment. Bulliet, Gauthier-Pilters and Wilson all argue for the potential importance of the camel as a provider of milk and meat to the underdeveloped world. There is a mysterious charm about the animal. The authors cited above have all fallen under its spell. Its staid and unexciting life and its functional adaptation to desert life and the benefits that it can bring to the peoples of the Arid Zone. The literature on the camel is similarly beguiling. Wilson's book is a distinguished contribution to that literature. It is well researched, lucid and makes fascinating reading.

## Nasty side-effects

P. V. Danckwerts

LEEN DAVIS  
The Corporate Alchemists: The power and problems of the chemical industry  
320pp, Temple Smith, £14.95.  
0851172466

As the cannibal said to the anthropologist, "We don't eat Americans any more. They have too much DDT in their bodies." This must have been in the late 1950s, when the image of DDT had begun to tarnish. It was a knock-down insecticide which expeditiously killed flies, lice, fleas, mosquitoes and other vectors of disease. It was credited with saving millions of lives after its introduction and was of enormous value in agriculture. It took a good many years to discover that this "wonder chemical" had its dangers. It found its way into the bodies of higher animals where it had the facility to lodge for years. Clinical symptoms appeared in these animals, as well as in the operatives in the chemical plants which made DDT. Moreover, natural selection led to the emergence and dominance of strains of mosquitoes and other insects which were resistant to it.

DDT thus stands as a prototype of the enormous number of insecticides, herbicides and drugs which have poured out to the world markets since the end of the Second World War. Their initial impact often seemed almost miraculous. In many cases doubts began to creep in when toxicity or the emergence of resistant strains became apparent, and eventually the substance was strictly controlled or banned in countries which have the necessary regulatory agencies, but sales continue in less industrialized countries which do not. These substances may save millions of lives or vastly increase agricultural production; but often these benefits have to be weighed against undoubted dangers, including human fatalities. It is not always easy to draw up a balance-sheet. For instance Lee N. Davis seems to imply that the continued sale of DDT in Central America is merely a cynical example of the corporate greed for profits. I wonder whether an informal inquiry might not suggest that its use still represents a net benefit.

Ms Davis considers a number of case histories of the deleterious effects of the chemical revolution which has progressively taken over our lives in Europe, the United States and (more recently) Japan. These range from the early and blatant environmental effects of the Leblanc alkali process in Lancashire to the early nineteenth century (which were curbed partly by legislation but mainly by the introduction of radically new and more economic production processes with no offensive by-products) to the far more insidious effects of the sophisticated chemicals produced since the last war. The latter include not only drugs, herbicides and pesticides but the materials used for the manufacture of plastics or polymers, which have become necessities of life in half the world.

## Fresh blooms

Chris Humphries

BOB GIBBONS  
How Flowers Work: A guide to plant biology  
160pp, Poole, Blandford Press, £8.95.  
0131 12783

The subtitle, "A guide to plant biology", is a more apt description of this elementary treatment of how new flowerlog plants fit generally into the plant kingdom as a whole. In eight chapters Bob Gibbons gives a simple, fairly informative, although somewhat old-fashioned account of the structure, life cycles, physiology, evolution, classification and ecology of flowering plants.

The opening chapter on evolution and classification is particularly out of date. This is a pity because the recent quarrels among evolutionists which have led to interest being taken in new classifications of flowering plants in relation to their "flowerless" allies, have been neatly bypassed in preference for narrative more akin to a 1960s text book. Another chapter describes the importance of phylogeny and how plants obtain their water and

Her examples range in character from the Flixborough explosion (due to faulty plumbing), to the disaster of Thalidomide, which seems to have been due to a failure to acquire or to communicate the results of clinical tests, and to the events of May 1973 in Michigan, when a truckload of a highly toxic chemical was delivered to the State's largest agricultural feed plant, where it was mixed with cattle feed which was sold across the state. By the end of 1973 thousands of animals were ill or dying. In the course of time virtually all the 9 million inhabitants of Michigan had eaten contaminated meat and milk; some, particularly farmers, fell ill very soon, others have the poison in their bodies and are hoping that it does not manifest itself by way of clinical symptoms in themselves or their progeny.

A good deal of the hostility displayed by the public towards the chemical industry arises from the discharge of waste materials to the environment. Ill results may arise from lack of forethought, ignorance or sheer uncaring expediency. As Davis says, and as every chemical engineer is taught as part of his professional training and ethical code, the problem should be provided for during the design of a chemical plant and not left until operations have started. However, there is likely to be strong commercial pressure to get the product on the market as soon as possible and hence perhaps to regard waste-disposal as Phase Two of the design.

Drugs are a source of particularly ambivalent feelings among the public. According to Davis, 1912 was probably the first year when a visit to the doctor by a patient was likely to be beneficial to the patient. Within the past five decades diseases that killed millions of people a year have become curable or controllable, and much of the credit for this progress belongs to the drug companies. The average patient visiting a doctor expects the prescription of a pill and yet every now and again some incident like Thalidomide sets off a wave of resentment against the drug companies, which are accused of greed for profits and callous disregard for side-effects. This strengthens the appeal of herbal and homeopathic remedies which have so little effect of any kind that they are unlikely to be lethal. It is interesting to reflect that aspirin, one of the earliest of the synthetic drugs (1898), has become as homely as a cup of tea, although its side-effects would probably prevent its introduction to the highly regulated market of today.

It is true, of course, that the drug industry as well as the other chemical industries exemplify free enterprise at its extreme. Competition is intense and every GP in the land receives many kilograms of promotional literature ("ethical advertising") per year. Davis claims that the drug companies spend more on advertising than on research, and suggests that many unnecessary variants on a basic formula are produced. Be that as it may, the spur of commercial advantage seems to produce results. The Soviet Union is not notable for its contribution to pharmaceuticals and Russia are

addicted to folk remedies (see *Cancer Ward*).

The principal hazards arising from the modern chemical industries, whether they manufacture drugs, pesticides, plastics, dyes or any of the products on which we have come to rely (or shall do so when they are offered to us), have one thing in common. This is the risk that a particular substance which appears quite benign will turn out to have a poisonous effect which only manifests itself years or decades after exposure. In the case of new drugs, how far should animal testing go before they are cleared for clinical use with human beings, and who is to organize and interpret the response of patients? Some workers who handle a particular chemical in a factory die within twenty years of leukaemia (say), who is authorized and qualified to determine whether the incidence of the disease is significantly above expectation? Sometimes the connection between cause and effect is clear; often it is only statistical analysis which can say that "the odds against this outcome being due to natural causes are ten to one". The general ignorance about the concepts of statistical significance is exemplified by the publications of investigative journalists.

Davis's own approach seems admirably pragmatic. Like it or not, we are dependent on the chemical industry. It presents certain dangers but they must be regarded in proportion to the many other dangers we all face every day. They can be minimized by regulatory procedures but there is a variety of reasons why these can never be completely effective. Government regulatory agencies are usually handicapped by lack of funds and the extraneous interests of politicians. In any case, effective regulation requires the collaboration of the companies themselves, since only they have the necessary details of the processes involved. The companies are extremely reluctant to reveal industrial secrets. Any attempt to prohibit

the manufacture of a chemical is likely to be resisted by management and shareholders, by the workers who may lose their jobs and (in the United States) by states which may lose the industry to another state.

Davis does not condemn the chemical industry as a typical example of the evils of capitalism (it would in any case be difficult to do so in view of the dismal record of the Soviet Union in such matters as the poisoning of Lake Baikal). She feels that the really large companies such as Dupont, ICI and Hoechst place most importance on preventing poisoning and pollution because they can afford to take the long-term view and ensure that their public image remains clean. Perhaps they can afford to indulge their ethical inclinations too.

The book's most sombre chapter deals with the use in developing countries of substances already banned in the United States, for instance. These substances are not allowed to be exported to a second country but there are many ways in which this ban is overcome, for instance by setting up manufacturing companies in Europe or the developing countries or by exporting the raw materials for manufacture.

Davis discusses a number of regulatory procedures which might mitigate some of the dangers. For instance, the United States government could strike a "bargain" whereby the chemical industries might enjoy prolonged patent rights in exchange for a longer period of testing for toxicity. Control of the international trade is much more difficult and is likely to run into all the frustration associated with the United Nations.

*The Corporate Alchemists* could be read with advantage by all chemical engineers and directors of chemical companies, as well as by laymen who would like to know more about the problems involved than they can get from the Sunday newspapers. A cheaper edition is required though, if it is to have much influence.

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# The ups and the downs

## Galen Strawson

ANNE OLIVIER BELL (Editor) assisted by  
ANDREW McNEILL  
The Diary of Virginia Woolf  
Volume V: 1936-1941  
416pp. Hogarth Press. £17.50.  
0 7012 0566 0

Most diaries tilt continually with self-deception. They come forward as private records, but they squint self-appraisingly at publication – first at publication to family and friends, then, perhaps, at publication to the world. And so they are inherently unstable in their discourse. There is no firm ground between the public and the private, and the motives of private diarists are never entirely free from conflict.

Perhaps the deepest source of conflict lies in the very idea of private writing. To write a private diary is, as it were, to speak to oneself. But to write at all is already to speak to another, however indefinite. Indeed there is a sense in which to write at all is already to publish – unless (or perhaps even if) one employs a code one believes unbreakable; since to set down words at all is already to give them independence from the private sphere.

Like any moderately reflective diarist, Virginia Woolf knows all these things, but she pays them little attention, out in her garden room at Monk's House in Sussex. Why does she write a diary? She is "not quite sure". "What the point is of making these notes I don't know"; but "some of it may interest me later". "I might one day brew a tiny little ingot out of it in my memoir." The diary also provides a certain defence against "the cold madness that overcame me last night . . . I intend to keep full notes of my ups & downs . . . to write out my horror . . . Thus objectivized, the pain & shame become at once much less."

But these are not her principal motives for writing a diary. She has, certainly, a simple desire to maintain some sort of record of her life and times, but above all she keeps a diary to "unclutter" her mind, to "cast her head", to "draw and drowse a little" with her pen. Her diary is a "running ground". It is her "fidget ground". She takes it up after bouts of high concentration, in the ten minutes before lunch, say, turning to her "free", her "irresponsible page" for a "run of her pen", a "scribble", a "scamp". Many of the entries are clearly written headlong, visibly propelled by the amperand, achieving spontaneity by sheer speed – the accelerated release of one who, writing expressly for publication, cuts and changes incessantly and "feels in [her] fingers the weight of every word". "I wish," she says, "I could conglobulate thoughts like Gide." But she is not a Gidean Journalist. Her diary is far less of a performance. It is not a plotted repository of *pensées*. She rapidly gathers impressions, she accumulates and apposes without sustained design. She does not construct, or emit maxims, or elaborate conceits, pictorial or intellectual. Her thoughts come singly; they are not ramified or pursued.

The diary is not great prose; but it is very rarely clumsy. It has no calculated periodic pretensions, but it is sharp and clean, cant-free, almost entirely devoid of anything coy, alive with odd, evocative juxtapositions and rich, unusual applications of words. Quite often her ideas are not very well or clearly expressed (very occasionally, the clarity is the product of discretion). Quite often she repeats herself. Sometimes she stumbles or forces an aside, and knows it: "I mean the only way to avoid crust is to get a faggot of words like a blaze. That phrase flags. Well, let it." And then she produces a fine and highly characteristic phrase: "The cadaverous twanging in the sky begins," as the German bombers pass daily over Sussex in the summer and autumn of 1940. "There are little gummy notes under the trees as if buds were popping, twigs exploding" (March 1937); she hears her "Ashham rooks dropping their husky caws through the guinea [Mince 1940] air". This is Woolf's strange language of nature; it is reminiscent of the pigeons that shuffle in the London treetops at the beginning of *The Waves*, or the flowers that flashed in the fading light at the end of *Between the Acts*. Nature is depicted as a slightly violent, unnervingly *insouciant* mechanism; a

mechanism whose actions are often tinged with a certain malignity, particularly in spring, when the trees extend their little green claws.

As recorded in her diary, Woolf's life receives its primary structure from her work. Other people – friends, acquaintances and other irritants – are in the background (the emphasis of her letters is of course different). It is a tumultuously crowded background; she and Leonard Woolf are in demand. But she is never happier than when the two of them are alone together. The absence of visitors produces a "long trance of pleasure", "bliss day after day" – marred only by her intense and rather attaching annoyance when she loses at bowls. She feels an almost formal duty to note down the "sayings" at a dinner party (not to mention "the fume [that] rises from the old cabbage pall of literary gossip"), and to release a flock of memories, impressions and judgments on hearing of the death of a friend ("Oh that one could feel more for the deaths of ones friends!"). But even the death of her nephew Julian Bell, killed in Spain in July 1937, takes second place to her emotional relationship with her work.

Her last five years of life were extremely fruitful. In the period from the beginning of 1936 until her death in March 1941 she finally completed *The Waves*, arguably the weakest of her novels. She wrote *Three Guineas*, and her biography of Roger Fry, and, last of all, *Between the Acts*, a brilliant production of continuity out of fragmentation, an error-free deliverance of artistic unity out of sheer intermittence. She planned in addition "a grand tour of literature . . . a book of discovery"; wrote some fragments of memoir; and, "packing and pressing", numerous short stories, essays and reviews. And whatever she was doing appeared, at the time, the most difficult thing to do. Writing *Roger Fry*, she struggled unaccustomed with the constraints of facts ("there they are, contradicting my theories"), turning with relief from minute fact to "a gallop in fiction" (by this time *Between the Acts*), "switching from assiduous truth to wild ideas".

## In footnote form

### Masolino d'Amico

ROBERTO BAZZEN  
Scritti  
397pp. Milano: Adelphi. L. 18,000.

Roberto Bazzen was born in Trieste in 1902, of a German father who died when he was three, and an Italian Jewish mother. He was educated in German-speaking schools although, as he later recalled, he was, like everyone, "in his mother's circle, 'irredentista', or pro-Italy. German, however, remained his first and best loved language, the language he would have chosen to write fiction and poetry in. But, as he said in one of his notebooks: "I do not believe one can write books any more. Almost all books are footnotes blown up into volumes (*voluzioni*). I only write footnotes."

He did not even write many of those. Most of his "footnotes" were delivered orally, to listening friends, in various cities and over several decades. The books that inspired them were unfamiliar ones, new or out-of-the-way, often foreign, belonging to that Middle European culture that had not yet returned into fashion. Some recipients of Bazzen's "footnotes" were remarkable people. Foremost among them was the poet, Eugenio Montale, to whom Bazzen sent, in 1925, two forgotten books by a Triestino friend, Italo Svevo – thus reopening the case for Italy's most modern writer of the early part of the century. In time, publishers became aware of Bazzen's immense reading and nearly infallible taste. In the 1950s he helped Einaudi create their extraordinary list. Later, he was the brain behind the launching of Adelphi, the most ambitious and consistently successful publisher (Italian publishing house of the past twenty years).

Bazzen never had a proper job nor a steady address: he did not write for the newspapers (nor indeed did he read them); and he was never seen in any kind of society. Few people had even heard of him at the time of his sudden death in 1965. But since then his reputation – rather, his legend, has been growing steadily

A year later her view had changed: "I'm strained writing [*Between the Acts*] – so much more of a strain than Roger."

As is well known, Woolf awaited the reviews of her books with trepidation; asserting, on the one hand, that she now no longer much cared what the reviewers said, that she was free of it all, an "outsider", scornful of the world's opinion; and wondering, on the other hand, why



she cared so very much even about the opinions of those for whose judgment she had no respect at all. But her reviews in this period were, on the whole, highly favourable; and *The Waves*, on which she had worked for so long and so doubtfully ("feeble twaddle", "twilight gossip"), was, in her lifetime, her most successful book. If she treats anything as a real adversary

during these last years of her life, it is her own unyieldable head. Sometimes it seems treacherously. At other times it is muffled and barren. It has weather, geography, a metaphorical axis of its own. It is a dry cistern, a tight wound ball of string, a white vapour. It is like an old cloth, then springles, then overbearing full of rhythms, then not fully bloomed. Her brain won't grip, it is tired, unstrung, indented, creased, different, fagged, it dries out, it gives out, it wilts, it just stops. And then, brought to the state of an old washerwoman's flannel, it needs to be dandled – "The Unconscious is asking for a rise." And then the pressure of ideas and work rises again, creative and dangerous; the "old throb and spin" returns again. Behind which lies, as always, the threat of a foreign, overmastering hyperactivity, and an uncontrollable despair. She dealt with herself pretty well on the whole – "I've mastered the iron curtain for my brain. Down shut when I'm tied tight. No reading no writing. No claims, no 'must'" (October 1940) – until, in March 1941, furiously anxious about the worth of *Between the Acts*, she could not cope, and drowned herself in the river Ouse.

But the diary of the last five years is in no way a despondent document. It is abundant with linguistic pleasure and fierce, clear perception. It records great enthusiasm and great contentment, the passion of playing bowls and the happiness of "expansion into merry kitchen harum scarum ways" when the servants leave. Woolf is quite wrong to say that she only records "the dumps and the dismal" in her diary (just as she is wrong to say "Here I always write about writing"). As for the strain and suffering of work, it is, on balance, accepted. It is a price well worth paying. Approaching her sixtieth year, she is relaxed in the mouth of fame; she is "on the qui vive to describe age", determined to "observe perpetually", planning the "last lap of life" with eagerness and with a firm expectation (in 1940) of ten more productive years. "Occupation is essential." "Work, work, work – that's my final prescription."

witness a recent book by Giovanni Del Giudice, a thirty-four-year-old writer who never met Bazzen but who has interviewed people that had connections with him: *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*. Adelphi have paid fitting homage to their *émittance grise* by publishing his literary relics in a series of slim volumes. Now, to mark the house's twentieth anniversary, they have brought them together in a much larger volume of *Scritti* with an introduction by Roberto Calasso. The book contains "Il capitano di lungo corso", Bazzen's one unfinished novel; a selection of obituary texts from his notebooks entitled "Note senza testo", with a handful of articles as an appendix; a selection of letters to publishers, cataloging his appreciations of various books; and twenty-eight previously unpublished letters to Montale, written between 1925 and 1930.

"Il capitano di lungo corso" tells the story of a seaman's progressive estrangement from his wife. While he is away, she becomes a slut, drinking in bars and consorting with outcasts. He is reported dead in a shipwreck, but in fact has survived, having been swallowed by a whale. We have no way of knowing how the story was to end; what we have, in elegant prose (Calasso's?) are only told that the original text is in German) reads at times like an engaging anticipation of Italo Calvino's witty and ironic "fables".

The rest of the volume has more substance. The "Note senza testo" manage to preserve at least an echo of a conversational style which must have been fascinating. Such was Bazzen's horror of clichés and total lack of prejudice; and the "Intervista su Trieste", a description of the town's peculiar atmosphere at the beginning of the century, is compulsory reading for anyone interested in Svevo, Saba, or James Joyce. The "Lettere editoriali" contain many brilliant insights, very often ahead of their time. Here we begin with Bazzen's by now famous "discovery" (and clear-headed assessment) of Musil, for Einaudi. He had a special liking for works that contained an original, profound experience – such as Christopher

Burney's *Solitary Confinement* or André Dhotel's *Le plateau de Mazarin*. Among the books discussed are works by Sologub, Gombrowicz, Orabuena, Kubin, Bataille, Bruno Bettelheim, John Cage ("Alas! Yes"), Gottfried, Of Robbe-Grillet's *Le voyageur* Bazzen writes, among other things (to Sergio Solmi, in 1956): "the 'problem' of the 'simultaneity' of times and spaces (which is probably going to become the slogan Robbe-Grillet will build his career on) finds a solution only on the level of an impure film-making skill." Of Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* he writes: "In 1939: 'a good technicolour movie by and for the people'. This was not derogatory; Bazzen was a keen cinema-goer, and on the same page rages against Bresson's 'letrigly' and other style in *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*."

The letters to Montale have their memorable moments too. The most remarkable was written on September 25, 1928, and deals with Svevo's death. "I am afraid your article may be liable to misinterpretation", Bazzen writes. "It could help to establish the legend of Svevo the far-sighted bourgeois, cultured, understanding, a good critic, a keen psychologist in life, etc. He only had genius that was all. For the rest he was stupid, selfish, opportunist, gauche, calculating, tactless." In the same letter there is a tip of a more unusual kind, "Gandhi and Carlo are all right", Bazzen continues. "In Trieste they have a guest, a friend of Gaud's, with marvellous legs. Write a poem on her. The name is DORA MARKUS." As we all know, Montale duly produced a splendid poem with this title, which came out in 1937.

*My Dearest Dora: Letters to Dora* Livorno, her family and friends, 1880-1900, from John Ruskin, edited by her granddaughter Olive Wilson, a collection of 124 hitherto unpublished letters, spans forty years of friendship from Dora's schooldays to Ruskin's death. The volume is available from Olive Wilson, La Grange Court, Wandersmoor, London LA23 3AJ at £5.50 plus 50p for post and packing in the UK (75p, abroad).

# With a public in mind

## Denis Donoghue

IAN JACK  
The Poet and His Audience  
198pp. Cambridge University Press. £20  
(paperback, £6.95).  
0 521 26034 5

In 1937-8, W. B. Yeats prepared and took part in four BBC radio programmes of modern poetry, including his own. A photograph of him, on one of those occasions, forms the frontispiece of Ian Jack's *The Poet and His Audience*. It is a charming picture: the poet is decently pleased with himself, seated before a microphone, addressing an audience he could only imagine. But it is misleading as an emblem of Professor Jack's book. Nothing in Yeats's poetry is clarified by the consideration that one of his several audiences was provided by the new technology of radio. He didn't, in any tangible sense, write for that audience.

Jack's aim is "to throw light on the careers of six major poets by considering how far the audiences for which they wrote seem to have influenced their poetry". He remarks that his book "has no thesis": its aim is "descriptive, not prescriptive: exploratory, not exhortatory". What interests him, he says, "is how certain good poems came to be as they are".

The chosen poets are Dryden, Pope, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson and Yeats. Jack does not explain how he settled upon these rather than upon another six. Presumably it would have served his interest just as well to have studied the careers of Milton, Johnson, Wordsworth, Keats, Browning and Eliot, since he has disavowed a thesis and added a conclusion to explain that he hasn't concluded anything.

Career is the word to emphasize. Jack sees the ideal situation of a poet as a series of concentric circles. The poet is the centre, best understood in Wordsworth's phrase as "a man speaking to men". The first circle is family, or any little group of intimates. "If he is not to find himself in desperate straits", Jack says, "a poet needs an inner circle of 'Understanders' . . . who form his initial audience, comprehend his poetic aims, and are in a position to provide him with the blend of praise and criticism which suits his particular temperament." Beyond that circle there should be another, people sufficiently like-minded to receive the poet's work in a sympathetic spirit. If the poet is fortunate, he has a further circle, a "reading public", otherwise anonymous, people who read his work with goodwill and understanding.

If a poet lacks any of these circles, his work is bound to suffer. Jack thinks that Hopkins's work was distorted, forced into oddity, by the lack of a sympathetic audience; and that in general a poet who has few readers – Emily Dickinson and William Blake are his examples – "is likely to exhibit some of the eccentricities of a man or woman too much in the habit of living alone". Such a poet is liable to errors of tone, of what I. A. Richards called "the perfect recognition of the writer's relation to the reader in view of what is being said and their joint feelings about it".

Of the poets in Jack's book, Dryden was the most fortunate in his profession: "It seemed to him self-evident that the poet's role was a public one; and that the centre of his audience should be the King and the Court". Pope's circumstances weren't quite so congenial. He was a Court poet, Jack says, "born at a time when the Court was ceasing to be the cultural centre of England". To reach a large audience, Pope had to trade on shoddy emotions, including vanity and envy. He was anxious that the subscribers to his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* should be the best society of both parties, so that the public would follow; even for the worst reasons, where the important people led. Dukes and duchesses, he said, "are indistinguishable from other men's vanity of being joyed with them".

Tennyson's circumstances were also fortunate. He belonged to a family of poets; as Jack notes, "and his first audience had been his family". He had enough understanders – Hallam, Aubrey de Vere, Edward Fitzgerald – to keep him going. He had also enough apostles in the public world – Monckton Milnes, Sterling, Spedding – to review his books and keep them in circulation.

Beyond those circles, Tennyson's access to a reading public was, if anything, exorbitant: he had to constrain himself, Jack thinks, in deference to his popularity. Bagebot was glad, as Jack reports, that Tennyson had "sided with the world" in the *Idylls*, after *Maud*, which had appealed only to "Tennysonians". But it was a burden, in the end, to know that the world expected to be sided with.

Jack would not claim that his study of these six poets and their readerships is comprehensive. He has not gone far into the questions posed by the sociology of literature – into the issues raised by, for example, Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*, R.P. Blackmur's *Anni Mirabiles* and many other books of similar concern, which address questions of education, literacy, the local conditions of publication, issues of morality, politics and law. Jack refers to Byron's "conflict with the standards of the day", to "the tone of high civilization during the reign of Queen Anne", to Pope as "a sophisticated poet writing in the last age of the Renaissance tradition", and, in the chapter on Tennyson, to "the taste of the age". But these phrases are unreliable, they call for detailed analysis and recourse to far more evidence than anything produced in *The Poet and His Audience*. It is much to the point that Wordsworth should deplore, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), the popularity of "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse"; also that he should reflect upon the urban conditions which produced "a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies". A far-reaching sociology of literature would deal with such considerations. But I don't think any particularly cogent point is made by Jack's reference to the taste of the age, the age being Tennyson's, a period which includes not only "Victorians", in some prematurely received sense, but also the under-world of literature which Steven Marcus has studied in *The Other Victorians*. It would be far more illuminating to know who were the readers who bought 60,000 copies of *In Memoriam* within a few months: were they largely composed of a particular social class which could be described by reference to professions, lineage, money and so forth, or did they include people of all classes?

I wish Jack had looked more closely into the bearing of a poet's style upon the readership he hopes to attract. He has a fine passage on Shelley's sense of the distinction between his esoteric and his exoteric writings, but he doesn't go any further into the corresponding styles than to note that "I met Murder on the way" is written "in a style admirably suited to a large audience". In the chapter on Tennyson he thinks that the disappointing reception of "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington", by comparison with the popularity of "The Charge of the Light Brigade", is sufficiently explained by remarking that the verse form of the "Ode" "was too difficult for the common reader", and that the "Charge" "is in a simple metre which rendered it suitable for a wide audience". I'm not sure that the difference can be explained at all, or what would count as explanatory factors, but I don't think the metres explain much. Maybe the "Ode" was too long and straggling or too complacent in possession of its sole memorable line, "The last great Englishman is low".

But the limitation of Jack's book, the fact that it doesn't study the ways in which particular features of a poet's style identify a site of feeling and draw readers into it, is largely self-imposed. He has stuck to the external considerations, worldly procedures of buying and selling, a poet's promotion of his wares. He hasn't gone in for close work, the analysis of style and rhetoric. This limitation is surprising in view of the results achieved by analytic work in such books as Ralph Cohen's *The Art of Discrimination* (1964) and David Trotter's *The Making of the Reader* (1984). Jack hasn't much confidence in the relation between practical criticism and the sociology of authorship and readership. Or so it would seem from a surprising question he asks: "how much can we in fact deduce about Gray's 'attitude to his listeners in the Elegy'? As much as we want to deduce, I would think; mainly on the authority of the deductions William Empson made from the

"Elegy" in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), including this one:

The tone of melancholy claims that the poet understands the considerations opposed to aristocracy, though he judges against them; the truism of the reflections in the churchyard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claim as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death.

Empson has more to say about the relation between Gray's style, in the "Elegy", and certain social and political sentiments. But the passage above is enough to show what I mean by deductions made from close reading; and why I find it disappointing that Jack has remained so far outside the poems he has studied. In the chapter on Yeats he quotes the most famous observation on his subject, Wordsworth's remark in the "Essay Supplementary to the Preface, 1815" that "every Author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed". But Wordsworth says as well that "the predecessors of an original Genius of a high order will have smoothed the way for all that he has in common with them; – and much he will have in common; but, for what is peculiarly his own, he will be in the condition of Hannibal among the Alps". The relation between a poet's sense of "what is peculiarly his own" and of "the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed" comes down to the most intimate ensemble of details, particular marks of a style, qualities of diction, syntax and rhythm, nuances of rhetoric at once public and personal. I'm not sure that it is adequate, in this context, to say that "Yeats created the taste by which his poetry is enjoyed". It would be just as useful to say that Yeats created the taste by which his poetry is resented; the enjoyment of his high-horse rhetoric being, for some readers, such as to incite a subsequent misgiving, scruple, or disgust. But only a sustained and intimate engagement with the detail of Yeats's poems would make either of these statements worthwhile.

# Not so familiar

## Neil Berry

JAMES HOGG  
Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott  
Edited by Douglas S. Mack  
79pp. Scottish Academic Press. £5.50.  
0 7073 0338 9

There has always been a suspicion that James Hogg wrote two versions of his recollections of Scott. But only one of them, known as *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, seemed to have survived. Douglas Mack published an edition of this with the *Memoir of the Author's Life* in 1972 (reviewed in the *TLS* of February 2, 1973). Recently he found the other version – apparently the original – among Hogg's papers in Wellington, New Zealand, and it is now published for the first time.

After Scott's death, Hogg showed his reminiscences of the novelist to a would-be opportunist biographer. They would soon have appeared in print, but for the intervention of J. G. Lockhart to whom Hogg had also shown them. Lockhart was disgusted by what Hogg had written and as Scott's literary executor and official biographer, did everything he could to suppress it. Though Hogg's remarks about Scott eventually appeared, in America in 1834, they were, as can be seen from the newly discovered MS, somewhat doctored.

Lockhart especially objected to a statement by Hogg about Lady Scott's use of opium and also to his "flagrant assault" on Scott's veracity. As it turns out, Hogg merely meant that Lady Scott resorted to laudanum as a pain-killer and that Scott on occasion claimed for Lady Scott a doubtful aristocratic ancestry. Indeed Hogg's original portrait is reverent enough, for all its warts, and that Lockhart found it repugnant is further evidence of his anobility and caste-consciousness. Douglas Mack's edition is carefully annotated, and he is enthusiastic about his discovery, though the two versions are not in fact all that different.



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# Appointment in Prague

Blake Morrison

ROBERT McCURM  
The Fabulous Englishman  
274pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.  
024113172

Robert McCrum's three novels have each confronted pertinent contemporary issues in a spirit of left-liberalism. In the *Secret State* (1980) was a le Carré-ish thriller, with grim warnings about the increase of surveillance and eroded liberties in modern Britain. *A Loss of Heart* (1982) told of a radical journalist's exposure of pharmaceutical malpractice in the Third World, and of his schoolteacher brother's unwitting involvement with a terrorist gang. Now, in the oddly titled *The Fabulous Englishman* (the hero is not at all fabulous, and though indubitably English might not relish being a thin echo of a novel by Kingsley Amis), McCrum recounts a trip behind the Iron Curtain through which the central figure is made to examine awkward truths about recent political history – and about himself. Similar journeys eastward have been the subject of two distinguished recent novels. Saul Bellow's *The Dean's December* and Malcolm Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange*. McCrum's book is not in the same league (or leagues) but none the less offers a fresh and interesting perspective.

Its hero is Christopher Iles, who was once, we're told, "famous for fifteen minutes" (quoting Warhol's cliché has itself become something of a cliché) with a book which sounds like a mish-mash of *Bomb Culture*, *The Greening of America* and editorials from *Oz* and *IT*: success brought him colour supplement interviews and controversial appearances on chat shows ("Do you accept, Mr Iles, that your book is a manifesto for oral sex?" "Oral sex has never needed any manifesto from me"). But that was in the long lost 1960s. Now, time-marooned and lonely (his name is an anagram of "isle"), Iles pursues the sort of life he would have once called "compromised", writing copy for an advertising agency and settling down with a wife (unfaithful) and three daughters in a house in Wandsworth. Though he still nurtures ambitions to write another book, his publishers have long since marked him down as a has-been.

That one hopeful thread between then and now has been his correspondence with a Prague bookseller and bibliographer, Peter Cisar, to whom he sends news, English and American novels, chess moves and private thoughts. Uncharacteristically, Iles has kept the letters going for fifteen years, spurred on by Cisar's belated revelation that he is the father of Milena, an old girlfriend of Iles' from the days of 1968 (she returned to Prague at the time of the Soviet occupation). Iles and Cisar have never met but there is at last a prospect of

their doing so, in Vionna.

The meeting itself proves abortive but on the train journey Iles meets a larger-than-life, Schindler-like millionaire entrepreneur called Thomas Kuhn: they talk, Iles is captivated, and briefly there is the promise that he will write Kuhn's biography. This, too, typically for the hapless Iles, comes to nothing. But it has the effect of spurring him on to make the journey to Prague itself, where he learns of two deaths. The second of these we have seen coming and it makes for a slightly disappointing climax. The first, quite unexpected, provides an excellent twist to the novel two-thirds of the way through – and incidentally makes a serious, *Index on Censorship*-like point about the importance of Western writers to Eastern European intellectuals.

*The Fabulous Englishman* is Iles's story, then, though there is the additional Nabokovian element of an "editor" who breaks in pedantically and self-importantly to tell us of his part in the book's making – a device as superfluous as the rat dropping out of the sky on the first page of *A Loss of Heart*, and one similarly at odds with McCrum's otherwise careful verisimilitude (no publisher's editor would put himself into a book like this, and if he did he'd soon be blue-pencilled out by colleagues). McCrum is himself an editor, of course, and the novel's structure suggests that he has learnt something from his most famous Czech author at Faber, Milan Kundera, at any rate in the matter of cross-cutting and time-shifts. The chief strength of the book, indeed, is something it does not press home thematically, but which its structure invites the reader to reflect on – that is, the playing off of London and Prague, and of culture and counter-culture.

The novel makes extensive use of pop songs, not just for period "flavour" but for chorus-like comments and nudges; particularly good use is made of a song by the Czech underground group, the Plastic People. Many of the songs, though, are well-known and predictable – "My Generation", "She Loves You", "Let's Spend the Night Together" – and don't reflect the diversity of the LP albums described on Iles's shelves. This is an objection to the novel overall: its historical passages and interpolated news items are too obviously taken from standard 1960s source books. Dabcock, Jan Palach, the Beatles, David Frost, the Russian tanks – there is nothing unexpected. Other misjudgments are the treatment of Iles, a less sympathetic character than the author might have wanted and unconsciously indulged by his boss, and the presentation of Kuhn, whose extraordinariness is everywhere spoken of but does not stand up for itself. Above all, there is the problem of McCrum's prose, never less than intelligible but never more than bluntly efficient. He is a fine organizer of his material and his concerns are important ones – a pity, then, that the writing should be so loiter.

## Unnatural hungers

Patricia Craig

PATRICK MCGINLEY  
Foggage  
230pp. Cape. £8.95.  
0224022407

The gloom of Patrick McGinley's opening paragraph recalls the gloom of "The Great Hunger", though the hunger Patrick Kavanagh had in mind is appeased in the hero of *Foggage* by means of an aberrant liaison: this, the author's fourth novel, is a story of incest in the Irish midlands and its comic-opera effects, deviously orchestrated. The ill-luck attaching to such violations of nature is deflected away from the principals – an awful pair of middle-aged twins by the names of Mureen and Kevin Hurley – but not too far: retribution keeps lighting on those innocently entangled with the siblings.

Kavanagh's "His sister grunted in bed. / The sound of a sow taking up a new position" finds an echo in McGinley, who makes no bones about rendering to the fullest extent the charmlessness of Irish country ways. Women, though on the whole less attractive than hovers, thrive, as cattle do, on reasonable treatment. So muses Kevin Hurley, bulldozed, beef-eater,

schemer and hypochondriac (a pain in the testicles sends him running to his misogynist friend, a vet, with a story about a bull afflicted in the same way – a cock-and-bull story). Cows, hells, bulls and bullocks preside over this novel; the comedy, such as it is, comes from Kevin's bootless efforts to disengage himself from his shapeless sister's embraces; even marriage, a pretty drastic expedient, doesn't restore his peace of mind, or propitiate whatever cosmic agency has it in for himself and his associates.

It's impossible not to see in *Foggage* a falling away from the splendid antics and invocations of *For Phibs* (1983) and even from the playfulness of *Goosefoot* (1982), a kind of muted coprophilia having taken the place of the cleverness we'd come to expect from Patrick McGinley. *Foggage* reeks not so much of the air of the earth closet. This naturally witty author doesn't rise here to anything wittier than "you can't have your grass and eat it" – apropos of *foggage*, a farmer's conservation principle extended here to include the conserving of semen. The book is also a bit uneven in tone; Kevin comes to understand that what's most natural to him is also most unnatural; but the author hasn't quite decided whether to treat the impasse as paradox or farce.

# Fuelling the need

Jayne Pilling

COLIN THUBRON  
A Cruel Madness  
168pp. Heinemann. £8.95.  
0434779843

Colin Thubron's travel writing has been widely acclaimed, most recently *Among the Russians*. The transition to fiction was not immediately successful: *The God in the Mountain* was a rather ponderous first novel, interesting for its observations of failure in love but overburdened by its socio-political setting. *Emperor*, a fictional account of Constantine's conversion to Christianity, was successful as imaginative historical reconstruction, but even more promising as an exploration of the ways and means of fiction making. *A Cruel Madness* sees Thubron in full possession of considerable talents as a novelist: the book is a quietly extraordinary tour de force.

The cliché title is intentional. For the author takes as subject the fertile but well-ploughed terrain of obsession and madness, as method the tradition of unreliable first-person narrator, and uses them to tell a story which resonates beyond itself, to comment on the need for love as compelling, vital fantasy.

Daniel is a failed, rather hopeless but sympathetic English master in a prep school who works during holidays as a volunteer in a near-by mental hospital. His general lack of purpose seems to some extent compensated by his wry efforts to bring life and meaning to the inmates there, helping them to self-expression. "The Most Important Time in My Life" is one writing task he assigns: the few resulting samples, he offers us in the course of the book cruelly echo his own rush of remembrances when he encounters, in the hospital grounds, a woman he once loved, disastrously, ten years ago.

When he first met Sophia, she was a local doctor. His shocked realization that she must now be a patient, when she responds blankly to his greeting, and his increasingly frustrated attempts to bring her out, are interwoven with

his account of their brief affair. It is gradually revealed that their tortuous, intense relationship founded through one-sidedness. His obsessive, engulfing love made a fetish of her body and her very existence, causing her to draw back; the pain of retelling her eventual desertion disrupts the flow of the narrative, returning Daniel, and us, to the daily death-in-life of inmate intrigue and the mutually exclusive realities they inhabit.

Such realities are territories to be fought over and invaded by the strongest, making Daniel's neutrality a precarious no-man's-land, only tenable as a possible ground for Sophia's recovery. Trying to break through her vacancy, he encourages her to remember through writing – so their "story" recommences. But her first, then second, versions, while appearing to confirm his own, suggest a further, disturbing interpretation. Suspicion that he, as well as she, might be victim of his obsessive need seems confirmed by Daniel's casual admission to his inmate status. But even this a strategic way of admitting one lie in order to shore up another . . . and still others.

What is so impressive about *A Cruel Madness* is the way it transcends the conventional "novelized" case history. Thubron's descriptions of the hospital and its inmates are vividly convincing – fearfully so in their sad banality. The defences of a character traumatized by loss and separation – the madman's traditional cunning in weaving compulsive fiction – are appropriated by the novelist to impressive effect. As the fictions crumble, the careful yet unobtrusive mass of realistic detail also comes apart, revealing the imaginative drive, the desire to transform and distort facts in order to keep out a too-painful reality. The language, initially so precise, loses control of the world it has constructed, just as Daniel's sense of self becomes physically disassociated. Psychical and sexual impotence mirror the need that fuels fantasy, perpetually unable to fulfil the lack in reality; less clinically, the need for fiction, as for love, to make sense of ourselves and others. The final, anti-climactic chapter suggests the sad emptiness, as well as the peace, of the fading of that need.

## The Pinfold of Portsea

Peter Reading

KEITH WATERHOUSE  
Thinks  
188pp. Michael Joseph. £8.95.  
0718123298

"Luggage bath, ample, barbecue, Preston, float-plate, acorn, massive, larking, pay-bomb, Scanthorpe, pepper-tone, sapling, maypole . . ." Not Mr Polly, but the mind of Edgar Samuel Bapty (hero of Keith Waterhouse's new novel) working like a safety valve to release excess repressed during the bumdrum quotidian encounters of his boss. "His mind there drained of venom like a lanced boil of pus, he proceeds on his way."

Privileged admission to the secret places of a character's mind is one of the things you'd expect the author of *Billy Liar* to be very good at; and the whole of *Thinks* is just that – a day (the last, as it happens) in the life of Bapty viewed through his bizarre, editing thought-processes. "He is, like everyone, living a novel, and you are doing no more than read it over his shoulder."

We follow him from his first business of the day (amputating the legs of two offensive yobs whose feet occupy seats on the B.33 Portsea to Victoria), through a visit to Dr. Windows (Edgar's blood pressure is extravagant), to very amusing lunches (one with the boss of MetCable, to whom our man has gone for an interview, one with the third of his ex-wives), a visit to the Broadcasters Club, on to a knocking-shop (where we meet the kindly Ruth, perhaps his only real friend), back to Portsea, where we glimpse his place of employment (Portsea Sound) and finally to the Majestic Hotel and a projected one-night stand, solicited at the second lunch, with the third ex ("I don't suppose there's any chance of one last roll in the sack for the sake of Auld Lang Syne."

is there?"); this Odyssey liberally punctuated with booze.

When you have made an absolute prat of yourself (as Bapty would say), then your imagination compensates or exorcises that your ego may survive. *Thinks* deals with this subject-matter comprehensively. During the interview/first lunch, was he seen to "bat" dust off his shoulders? When he asserted indignation at something he was expected to be indignant about – MetCable not getting all the tax concessions it felt entitled to or some such balls-aching whine – did a bubble of spit come down his nose? This re-plays (to the third ex) as: "I'll tell you who I had quite a chat with today – in fact had lunch with him had a drink down his bumped into him at the Broadcasters Club: Ralph Jopcott, the top mao at Metropolitan Cable . . ." Justice, under whose auspices the yob leg amputations (by laser) were conducted, is also instrumental in the surreal destruction of Telecom's manager's bungalow (and of the culprit himself, back again) – a reprisal for the inoperability of so many public phone booths.

*Thinks* is brilliant in its observation, an urban and extremely funny kind of observation: "Watch him now as he rises and makes for the buffet car, already in his head, tapping coins on laminate as he addresses the swilling, bone-jide bastardising steward skulking in his pantry. . . . They are arriving [the Met Cable Execs] Hornor rubbing his palms together in a band-washing pantomime as he the way of management men when entering a restaurant." Bapty's day is hallucinative; he is a bit of a Pinfold "hearing his voice echoing in the lifeboats through some acoustic freak, in the amusement of shirt-sleeved men and office girls who roll their eyes and exchange mocking glances."

Obit. Bapty. "Publico, status, quoniam cum inglorius quantum theory magnificent language bath . . . his secular absolution."

# On the side of Job

Gabriel Josipovici

MURIEL SPARK  
The Only Problem  
188pp. Bodley Head. £7.95.  
0370306058

Muriel Spark's novels are a joy to read and a nightmare to talk about. Since they are often about readings and misreadings of situations and about joy and the killing of joy, it may be useful to try to understand what we mean when we say a novel is a joy to read. It has to do ultimately with the pleasure of being in good hands (not the same as the pleasure of "a good read", or what is usually meant by that term). Virginia Woolf put her finger on it when, talking about reading Proust, she said that while one was doing so one felt oneself to be more alive, more aware, than one normally was; and this of course corresponds to Proust's own sense that in reading fiction we are in some strange way entering not another person's world but our own.

The sense of being more fully aware has less to do with plot and character than with the multiplicity of minute local experiences. Reading Proust or Muriel Spark we encounter on every page little shocks which, taken cumulatively, engender a feeling of trust and gratitude towards the person who has been capable of administering them. The shocks are the result of the author's unwillingness to let pass any clichés of conduct or language.

Habits of thought and language are not easy to shake off; though our instinctive reactions may be genuine enough they are usually translated at once into terms which flatter out ambiguity and remove tension and contradiction. In Biblical terms, Job's comforters are always right, but their remarks are always irrelevant, because they speak from the outside. As Harvey Gotham puts it in *The Only Problem*, in answer to his Aunt Pet's remark that "There is a Christian message in the Book of Job": "But Job didn't know that." Or, as Klerkegaard put it, life is lived forward but can only be explained backward.

Muriel Spark's new novel is of course about Job's problem, the problem of suffering. On the back of the jacket is the reproduction of a beautiful painting of Job visited by his wife, by the seventeenth-century French painter, Georges de La Tour, now in the museum in Epinal, in the Vosges:

It bears a resemblance to the Dutch candle-light pictures of the time. It is extremely simple, and like so much great art of the past, surprisingly modern. Job sits par sa femme. To Harvey's mind there was much more to the painting to illuminate the subject of Job than in many of the lengthy commentaries that he knew so well. It was eloquent of a new idea, and yet, where had the painter found justification for his treatment of the subject?

Job's wife, tall, sweet-faced, with the intimation of a beautiful body inside the large tent-like case of her firm clothes, bending, long-necked, solicitous over Job in her hand is a lighted candle. It is night, it is winter; Job's wife wears a glorious red tunic over her dress. Job sits on a plain cube-shaped block. He might be in front of a fire, for the light of the candle alone cannot explain the amount of light that is cast on the two figures. Job is naked except for a loin-cloth. He keeps his hands above his knees. His body seems to shrink, but it is the shrunkenness of pathos rather than of pain. Beside him is the piece of broken pottery that he has taken to scrape his wounds. His beard is thick. He is not an old man. Both are in their early prime, a couple in their thirties. (Indeed, their recently-dead children were not yet married.) His face looks up at his wife, sensitive, imploring some favour, urging some cause. What is his wife trying to tell him as she beside her sweet face towards him? What does he beg, this broken man, to serene in his faith, so accomplished in argument?

This scene here seemed to Harvey so altogether different from that suggested by the text of Job, and yet so deliberately and intelligently contemplated that it was impossible not to wonder what the artist actually meant. Harvey stared at the picture and recalled the verses that followed the account of Job's affliction with boils:

And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself with: and he sat down among the ashes. . . . Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. . . . But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. . . . But while he was saying to him, Job's wife, in the scene, visible and tangible portraits of Georges de La Tour? The text of the poem is full of images, but the scene of the painting is full of images, too. The scene of the painting is full of images, too. The scene of the painting is full of images, too.

"Curse God and die." Harvey recalled that one of the standard commentaries has suggested a special interpretation, something to the effect, "Are you still going to be so righteous? If you're going to die, curse God and get it off your chest first. It will do you good." But even this, perhaps homely advice doesn't fit in with the painting. Of course, the painter was idealising some notion of his own; in his dream, Job and his wife are deeply in love.

Job's wife in this painting resembles Effie, Harvey's wife, and the book is set in the Vosges, where Harvey has gone, partly drawn by the painting, to write a commentary on Job. Harvey is a rich man who has walked out on his wife because he cannot stand her naive radical views. The last straw comes when she steals two bars of chocolate from an Italian motorway shop and passes them round to the other occupants of the waiting car with the remark that because two-thirds of the world is starving it's all right to steal from the capitalist oppressors. At this point Harvey gets out of the car and disappears from Effie's life. Back in London she takes a lover, Ernie Howe, and is expecting a child by him, but she likes to live in style and by her standards Ernie is not rich enough. That is how Edward, Harvey's friend and brother-in-law, once a clergyman and now an actor, finds himself driving up to Harvey's Vosges retreat to ask for a good divorce settlement for Effie. But Harvey isn't interested; he wants to discuss Job with Edward, as they used to do as students. Besides, his feelings towards Effie are not unmix: one part of him would like to have her back.

After that, things move fast (they always do in Muriel Spark). Effie has the child and abandons it. Her sister Ruth, Edward's wife, now comes out to see Harvey, bringing the baby with her. But instead of returning with the promise of a settlement she moves in with Harvey and is soon pregnant herself. Edward becomes a star and writes to Harvey to tell him how relieved he is to be rid of Ruth. Effie is rumoured to have been caught shop-lifting in Trieste. Then, suddenly, Harvey is taken in by the police for questioning: a terrorist gang calling itself the Front for the Liberation of Europe has been robbing supermarkets in the neighbourhood and Effie is believed to be their leader; Harvey is naturally suspected of helping them. He refuses to believe that his wife has become a terrorist and anyway just wants to be left alone to get on with his Job. Pregnant Ruth and Effie's baby Clara are whisked away out of danger, but instead of going to stay with Harvey's Canadian uncle, Ruth returns to London and moves in with Ernie Howe. A policeman is shot and killed by the gang in Paris. Harvey's aunt, having seen him on television ranting about the monstrous God of Job during a press conference in which he was supposed to be answering questions about Effie, rings Harvey up in consternation; then arrives in person to warn him that she has seen Effie, on a television documentary about Californian communes, emerging naked from a sleeping bag with a young man. Before this can be checked the police ask Harvey to come and identify the body of the leader of the gang who has been killed in a shoot-out. It is, in fact, Effie; Harvey involuntarily breathes a sigh of relief that she is there and not coveting to California sleeping bags with naked young men. In the last chapter, as to the first, Edward drives up to Harvey's cottage; but this time Ruth is back with Harvey and very pregnant. "What will you do now you've finished Job?" asks Edward. "Live another hundred and forty years. I'll have three daughters, Clara, Jemima, and Eye-Paint."

It is not that Harvey comes to acceptance at the end. He has been an accepting sort of person from the start. That is connected with his work on Job. Perhaps he turns to writing the commentary to assuage the suffering Effie has caused him, but that does not rob the writing of its meaning or importance, or of the genuine pleasure it gives him. Yet writing too is a kind of suffering, he realizes, suffering and joy combined, for it entails the daily struggle to shed cliché and habit, the daily effort to see things as they are and not as we would like them to be.

Why this novel, like all Muriel Spark's work, is a joy to read and a nightmare to talk about is precisely because it demonstrates the continual tiny triumphs of questions over answers. Its epigraph is accurate: "Surely I would speak with the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God." You don't need to be Job to do that. Strangely, though, it is something which art, especially verbal art, finds extremely difficult to convey. It is nearly always on the side of those who know, of the masters of language and argument, on the side, that is, of God and the comforters. This book, again like all of Muriel Spark's (and it is the reason why she is the best English novelist writing today), is on the side of Job, not theoretically, not in general terms, but in the minutest details of its perception.

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**LAWRENCE STONE and JEANNE C. FAWTIER**  
**STONE**  
*An Open Elite?*: England 1540-1880  
 566pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £24.  
 0 19 822645 4

The propensity to invest in land, found in the family and acquire gentry status, has been frequently remarked through the centuries, generally with the implication that these were English peculiarities. Sir Thomas Smith declared in 1563 that gentlemen 'be made good cheap in England'; and the custom is so consistently attested by 300 years of social observations, and individual instances of the process actually occurring, as so easily culled from any century - Cranfield, Child, Hoare, Wedgwood, Armstrong, Peel, Stuart, Wodehouse

These are touches of light relief encountered along the way. That way approaches the problem of the openness of the landed élite to new blood, not by tracing the centuries-old line-

marked failure to produce heirs. By calling him the fictive kin, however, family succession of the soror was kept going, and the actual extinction

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## Getting down to it

**PETER PAGNAMENTA and RICHARD OVERY**  
All Our Working Lives  
288pp. BBC Publications. £10.75.  
0563201177

To be working-class is, basically, to do hard.

## Making an issue of it

...nt legal changes in their industry



It is a great strength of this book that it integrates oral material with evidence drawn from a range of other sources. It sets out de-

In fact, surprisingly, the photographs are rather disappointing with, as usual, little attempt to analyse or interpret them. Still, the plate of "a low, wet seam in a South Wales

Clutterbuck gives British industry fifteen years to catch up with Germany and Japan and insists it can do so with "much faster" investment and a parallel willingness by employers and employees to embrace new microelectronic production techniques. That hook is not without irritations: Norman Tebbit is misspelt throughout, and the far-sighted electricians' union official who has pioneered "no strike" agreements based on "pendulum arbitration" in this country is misnamed Ray, rather than Roy Sanderson. More seriously, in view of his emphasis on worker participation, Clutterbuck declares - against all the evidence - that the EEC Vredeling directives on information-disclosure to employees "are in general supported by the Conservative government in Britain". In fact, the employers' ferocious anti-Vredeling lobby has been pushing at an open door in Whitehall.

Overall this book offers both more, and less, than it appears to. More, because it is really a comprehensive industrial, and even economic, history; less, because it does not in the end go into that detail of daily working life which we need to comprehend if we are to understand the frictions and irritations of the workplace that are of such ephrinous contemporary relevance. But this is a timely and well-produced book which will not embarrass the impressive list of academic advisers presented in the acknowledgements.

stage further K. G. J. C. Knowles's classic study of the period 1911-47, and is largely based on a daunting mass of data, both published and unpublished, from the Department of Employment. For all hut the most highly specialized readers this is a honk to be used for reference. However, those who hoped that the statistical analysis might be teavened with the worldly wisdom of one of the country's foremost arbiters, W. E. J. McCarthy, will not be wholly disappointed. There is an illuminating section on Order 1305, the wartime regulation prohibiting strikes, which it is easy to forget the Attlee government did not repeal until 1951.

The authors point out that the order made little difference to the strike rate but – by discouraging *official* strikes – did much to foster the shop steward movement. And they argue that the arbitration procedures under its replacement order 1376 (which the Conservatives also repeated in 1958 in the face of a sustained campaign by *The Economist* and others) were wrongly judged to be inflationary. The authors are certainly right to dismiss the sillier kind of academic study which tries to explain variations in strike incidence in terms of general changes in the economy, without any reference to the particular circumstances of the industries affected. They conclude that strikes “are an unfortunate necessity in that on some occasions, their benefits – which are indispensable to a democratic society – could not be secured in any other way”.

By contrast, Dr Clutterbuck is confident, perhaps a shade too confident, that most essential service-workers would happily trade their right to strike for a properly established review body. It is an irony that at GCHQ the government passed up its first real opportunity to test

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# Judgments on justice

Jeremy Waldron

DAVID LYONS  
*Ethics and the Rule of Law*  
214pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.50.  
0521 257859

It is presumably impossible to explain the concepts *medicine* or *hospital* without referring to the values—like life, health and perhaps knowledge—which those institutions characteristically seek to promote. Though some hospitals are better than others, still not everything that looks like a hospital should be described as a hospital. One hears, for example, that there were units established in Nazi concentration camps, where people lay in beds organized into wards, supervised by trained personnel, and managed on the same bureaucratic basis as our hospitals, but which were devoted exclusively to the performance of gasty experiments to test racial theories or hypotheses about deprivation and pain, and in which there was nothing more than instrumental concern for the "patients" committed to this "treatment". If someone were to say, "Sure, those units in the concentration camps were *hospitals*—the only question is whether they were *good* hospitals", we should be inclined to laugh at him.

Yet this is the sort of thing legal positivists—from Jeremy Bentham to H. L. A. Hart—have been saying about the concepts *law* and *legal system* for the past 150 years. There are, they say, no values internally related to law in the way that health, life, and knowledge are related to the practices of medicine. The purposes that may be promoted by laws are so many and conflicting—hardly fewer than the purposes for which men live in society—that we

must be able to identify laws and legal systems whatever the values that particular legislators are trying to pursue. Even the assorted decrees and prohibitions which the Nazis added to the legal system they inherited in 1933 must, on this approach, count as instances of and not as derogations from the rule of law in Germany.

Does this mean it is impossible to evaluate laws and legal systems from the outside? Surely not. If we think human institutions should promote the greatest happiness of those they affect, or ensure respect for human rights, then we can use those general standards to determine whether given laws are beneficial and just or oppressive and barbaric. The positivist point is that the values used to criticize law must be drawn from morality generally and not from a putative morality specific to the concept of law. Of course, some relativists will want to deny that there are any objective universal values that can be applied to law in this way: Marx, for instance, insisted that we could not use the morality of one epoch to determine the justice of the laws of another. But whatever its other failings, the identification of legal positivism with this sort of relativism is a slander.

The moral evaluation of laws forms the subject of a large part of modern jurisprudence or legal philosophy. David Lyons's book is not intended to advance any of the debates I have been sketching, though he has made very substantial contributions to ethics and political morality elsewhere. It is intended as an introduction to the area for use mainly as an undergraduates' guide through a complex and extensive literature. The book is written clearly enough and the author's opinions are often well argued and refreshing—not least his robust insistence that there is no general obligation to obey a law merely because it is the

law. (Lyons is right to notice that this can hardly be denied by anyone inclined, as he is, to the positivist view of the relation between law and moral values.) But its provenance as a series of lectures shows in the abstract, condensed and rather unexciting way in which the debates are set out, and I do not think it will be of much interest to the general reader: it is one of those textbooks which presupposes some acquaintance with the material it purports to introduce.

Even as a book for students, *Ethics and the Rule of Law* has some quite serious defects. The discussion of Hart's views is inaccurate. Hart is not a moral conventionalist; he does not say that our moral obligations are determined by the rules that happen to be socially accepted. He makes points about obligation which need to be carefully distinguished from that conventionalist view; but it is the function of a textbook to clarify such distinctions, not obscure them. Nor does Hart maintain that justice is done when a general law, whatever its content, is applied impartially to the cases that it covers. He does say that treating like cases alike is "a central element in the idea of justice", but that is slightly different; and again one would have thought it the task of an introductory text to elucidate that difference.

The other defects are sins of omission. For a

book concerned with the ethical evaluation of law, the range of moral theories that it explores is surprisingly narrow. Lyons discusses utilitarianism and John Rawls's theory of justice, and says a little about theories of rights. But there is no mention of Robert Nozick's theory of property, nor of other market-oriented theories of the New Right, nor even of the Hayekian ideal of the rule of law and its relation to liberty in the modern welfare state. At the opposite extreme, there is no reference to Marxist or socialist theories, whether the Marxist relativism that I mentioned earlier, or Marxist theories of law (eg. Pashukanis's view that the concept of law embodies specifically bourgeois values), or of socialist theories of justice, equality and exploitation. Similarly, the substance of natural law theories is neglected; though we are taken through the debate between legal positivists and their opponents there is no discussion of the values that natural lawyers like John Finnis have associated with the concept of law.

No doubt this is a tall order for a short introductory book. But if the price of brevity is a distorted impression of the interest, diversity and range of modern jurisprudence, perhaps students should be left to find their own way through the reading lists.

## By European standards

David Pannick

GERRIT W. GONG  
*The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*  
267pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £19.50.  
0198219482

On returning to Russia from a European tour in 1698, Peter the Great personally shaved the beards of leading Muscovites because he regarded them as "uncivilized". The appeal to standards of civilization continues to play a central role in our assessment of the conduct and the beliefs of others. At the most trivial level, such standards were shockingly applied a few years ago to the Arab sheikh who came to live in England and decided to take up the leisure activity of his landed gentry neighbours, shooting game; unfortunately unaware of the conventions, he decided to use a machine-gun. In the political context, the standards of civilization are constantly applied by one nation to judge the conduct of another.

When in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it became necessary to regularize the relationship between the colonial powers and the various New Worlds they had contacted, those powers developed the idea that to participate in international society, communities had to meet the criteria of a civilized society. The relevant standards were a vague application of Samuel Johnson's definition of "to civilize": to reclaim from savagery and brutality; to instruct in the arts of regular life. In practice, the criteria were applied so as to require subservience from different civilizations (often as old and as developed as those of the European powers) to the social and political norms of Europe. Under the protective umbrella of international law (which was created by European lawyers to serve the interests of their own nations), the civilizations of the East were admitted to international society on terms that required the assent of many of their basic practices and beliefs. The 1871 mission from Japan to the West made one public appearance dressed in traditional court kimonos before realizing that Japan would only be taken seriously if its representatives wore Western business suits. Those communities upon whom Western standards were thus imposed saw Europe as hypocritical, as well as presumptuous, since the European nations frequently displayed their own reluctance to obey basic principles of justice and decency.

Gerrit Gong has written a shrewd and powerful analysis of the creation, development and application of the standards of civilization as a tool of Western political policy. He describes the process by which European lawyers, churchmen and politicians united in their belief that their standards represented universal truths. The consequence was the im-

position on weaker nations of unequal treaties and the recognition of their autonomy only on the sacrifice of much of their tradition. Gong examines the impact of the standard of civilization in the non-European world with particular reference to the entry into international society of China, Japan and Siam. As he explains, the latter remained independent largely because it complied with all the standards of civilization: the British envoy who signed a treaty with the King of Siam in 1855 was impressed by the fact that "your cigars are handed to you out of gold cases blazoned with diamonds...". Now that was a civilized country.

Gong persuasively explains that many non-European nations retain a bond of resentment and humiliation at being judged, and found wanting, by European standards (especially when those standards did not prevent the horrors of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany). The difficulty with which Gong does not adequately grapple is whether (notwithstanding the hypocrisy and the arrogance of the West) the standards applied by the European powers were beneficial to those upon whom they were imposed and, if so, whether the West was justified in imposing them. Was it an indefensible exercise of imperial dominance to encourage a recognition of basic civil rights, an independent judiciary applying a settled code of law, democratic government and the eradication of practices such as suttee and slavery? When does proper liberal tolerance of cultural diversity become unjustifiable approval of barbaric practices?

Gong is at his least convincing in his conclusion that "most countries are now 'civilized' according to the old standard" and that, partly for this reason, the standard of civilization has declined in practical importance. Diplomats and politicians continue to plead reliance on civilized standards while the nations they represent persistently breach those standards in their daily conduct of domestic and foreign affairs. Nor does Gong adequately deal with the growing cultural challenge to the values of non-Western nations. There is a danger that the "civilized" values now being exported by the West are those articulated by Dalai Lama.

The importance of Gong's work is to remind the student and the practitioner of international diplomacy that many non-European nations retain a resentment for the efforts of Europeans to civilize them. Without understanding that attitude we cannot hope to comprehend the Iranian revolution, or the dispute between the US and Unesco, or any of the other diplomatic manifestations of cultural warfare. Lord Halifax thought that the world would have been much easier to manage if Hitler and Mussolini had been educated at Oxford. The safety of the world may depend upon the present generation of politicians avoiding similar condescension towards the leaders of "underdeveloped" nations.

## The Famous Five go for six

D. A. N. Jones

MICHAEL LEAPMAN  
*Treachery? The power struggle at TV-am*  
211pp. Allen and Unwin. £9.95.  
0047910410

The history of the introduction of American-style breakfast-time television to Britain is generally recognized as good comedy, a media-industry joke. Michael Leapman tells the story waggishly, wittily, not too unkindly. But it is a joke that might be repeated too often. Eight contenders for the breakfast franchise in 1980 produced grand brochures to impress the quango known as the Independent Broadcasting Authority: they used American rhetoric, in the Kennedy speech-writer style. Leapman pulls out a characteristic phrase from the successful TV-am brochure, in which the company vows to "open a dialogue with their viewers, playing an increasing role in enriching the quality of their lives".

Leapman remarks that some of the arbiters on the quango committee were sceptical about TV-am's rhetoric and "raised the spectre of London Weekend, which had been given its franchise in 1967 on a similarly well-inten-

tioned set of proposals (Brecht against *Match of the Day*, as the industry joke had it) and had all but foundered, being forced to abandon much of their highbrow prospectus in order to survive". Obviously, the easiest way to survive in the commercial media industry is to produce a tabloid—a little drug to be taken regularly for relaxation and/or pepping-up: if the tabloid becomes a habit with a predictable set of consumers, advertisers will sponsor it, for what are called "good economic reasons".

A similar competition for a broadcasting franchise has now opened in respect of the proposed national commercial radio channel. Sean Day-Lewis warns in the *Daily Telegraph* (usually a most sanguine supporter of commercial broadcasting): "A prospectus sufficiently high-minded to win the contract is likely to lose money in practice. The company and its output will then have to be turned into something completely different, for good economic reasons." He uses TV-am, not London Weekend, as his warning example. "The relationship between the TV-am that won the breakfast contract and that which has inherited the franchise is purely nominal. The 'mission to explain' of the early days was really a mission to impress the kind of people who are invited to serve on quango boards. The mission to suc-

ceed in the market place comes later." This being so, we had better read Leapman's book not only as a good retelling of an industry joke, but as a warning about the national organization of commercial broadcasting. "Good economic reasons" often mean false economies, producing worse services, like one-man buses which travel slowly, encourage rowdiness and graffiti on the upper deck and make the drivers neurotic.

The spokespersons for the TV-am prospectus were screen front-men or front-women, including two female news-readers, hoping to have a say in controlling and managing the company, as well as putting up a good front: they were nicknamed "the Famous Five", a label derived from Enid Blyton's bright-eyed stories, a truly British description—unlike the fiendish Chinese title, "the Gang of Four", foisted upon the founders of the Social Democratic Party, a comparable body. But some of the Famous Five were, in fact, rather American in their hopes and attitudes. Peter Jay, the former ambassador to Washington, told the quango about his "mission to explain", "the supreme mission of good television journalism", "a journalistic mission within the confines of the definition which the Authority has given...". The word "mission" has a power in

America which it lacks in Britain: see *Webster's Dictionary* and Hollywood movies. The same applies to "the chemistry between people", "the sexual chemistry", which the mid-Atlantic front-man, David Frost, presented as a good reason for giving the franchise to the TV-am team, rather than to AMTV or AM Television: he felt that the starry images of the spokespersons would strengthen the mission.

When the stars appeared before the fBA quango committee, one of the arbiters (a Scottish clergyman) observed: "Och, I meant to bring my autograph album with me but I forgot." More seriously, he asked whether breakfast television might not make children late for school. Peter Jay, responsible as ever, assured him that TV-am would positively urge them to go to school, not forgetting their dinner-money and gym-shoes: it would be "an important social contribution", said Jay, almost a great leap forward. So the Famous Five won the franchise—and when they failed to pull in enough consumers to please the advertisers they were winked out by the people behind the screen, descendants of Lord Beaverbrook. One of the female news-readers complained of "treachery", thus giving Leapman a title for his book. But surely it was just normal commercial practice, wasn't it?

## A dark night in the Vatican

Michael Davie

DAVID A. YALLOP  
*In God's Name*  
334pp. Cape. £9.95.  
0234020897

Pope John Paul I died between the evening of September 28, 1978 and the early morning of September 29. David Yallop, the author of *In God's Name*, is "totally convinced" that he was murdered.

This is a sensational allegation. The open-minded reader, in such circumstances, has the right to expect that the person making it should pass certain elementary tests. He should state his charges clearly; he should write with precision and care; he should not exaggerate; and he should, where possible, identify his sources.

Mr Yallop passes the first test. The Pope was poisoned; and one of six named men "was at the heart of the conspiracy". Unfortunately, the other tests are failed. Yallop is not a careful writer. In his preface he mentions "nearly three years" of intensive research: by the end of his "prologue" he has extended this period to "three years". Also in his preface he lists some of the people who helped him and to whom he is "deeply grateful". Among them appears the name of Roberto Calvi, the criminal financier who is one of Yallop's suspects. Surely Yallop is not "deeply grateful" to Calvi? And he is prone to exaggerate, telling us, for example, that Venice has sold its soul to tourism, and that Licio Gelli, another suspect, "controlled Italy".

## Life with the mobsters

Laurie Taylor

ANTOINETTE GIANCANA and THOMAS C. RENNERT  
*Media Princess*  
304pp. Allen and Unwin. £8.95.  
0047923778

So superb has been Martin Short's recent Thames Television series on the Mafia, *Crime Inc.*, that one was beginning to wonder if there was still any place left for that other close-knit bunch of professional hustlers—the Mafia writers. We have had so many inside stories on the Mafia that it is difficult to take seriously the claim, made by the author of this latest one, Thomas Rennert (who already has *My Life in the Mafia* to his credit) that here is a "new and significant chapter in the lore of the strange, violent, and secret world of the Mafia". But at least Rennert has an angle: Antoinette Giancana is the daughter of a top Mafia man.

Unfortunately nothing in the opening pages or thereafter suggests that we're going to go

very deeply into her relationship with her father. Antoinette appears as "I" from the first page, but the heavy clanking of her ghost-writer's prose soon makes us doubt her actual presence. This is how she first describes her father, Chicago casino boss, Sam Giancana: "He acknowledged my presence with a frown. I remember vividly feeling a chill course its way up my spine as he flicked an imaginary speck from his slacks while his cold piercing brown eyes looked at me as if they were X-raying my mind".

But slowly the old best-selling ingredients of the Cosa Nostra saga begin to exert their appeal. We get plenty of the splendid religious hypocrisy which allows Sam to be out in the evening gunning down rivals and informants, then up in the morning slapping fat cheques into the eager hands of the clergy. (The usual story gets an extra twist here when Sam's personal priest, loveable old Father Joe, not only collects from Sam but ends up seducing Antoinette.) Once again we are caught up in that familiar cast-list of top villains: Albert Anastasia, Joe Bananas, Little Caesar, Murray

the Camel and Frank Nitti. Music and laughter, as usual, are provided by the stars of stage and screen: in Giancana's case, Jimmy Durante, Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. And around and about, much to Antoinette's disgust, skip a whole chorus of FBI men with thousands of bugging devices recording practically every word and movement made by Sam until eventually someone in the mob decided that he was getting a little too hot for comfort and put seven bullets through his head.

The real victim of all this drama is the increasingly tragic figure of Antoinette, a young girl trying to develop a sense of her own worth. But denied the use of her surname, and the merest scoldgeon of parental sensitivity, she falls: falling back on to a worthless marriage, years of childbearing, depression, ECT treatment, abortion, drink, and finally the divorce for which Sam, with his usual firm sense of moral propriety, never forgave her.

This is biography or autobiography at one remove; the True Confession, which in both style and content owes more to the genre than to truth.

Why do it? The only possible reason is that the writer thinks the device will create verisimilitude. But it has the opposite effect. If the writer has reconstructed conversations, what else has he reconstructed? By the time the reader reaches the final section he has lost faith in his informant. By now it is Yallop, rather than his suspects, who is in the dock. The Pope was poisoned; the medicine bottle by the Pope's bed was "pocketed" by Cardinal Villot. But Yallop does not tell us how he can be so confident that he knows what went on in the Pope's bedroom in the early hours of September 29. Shortly before the end of the book comes a surprise—a reference to "my interpreter". Can it be that Yallop does not speak Italian?

Samuel Johnson  
1709-84

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# The Fawcett Library

Jennifer Uglow

*The first in a monthly series in which authors write about a particular library or archive in which they have worked.*

It is quite an expedition to the Fawcett Library: out of the tube at Aldgate East, round the corner into Old Castle Street to the Calcutta House Precinct of the City of London Polytechnic, through the glass doors, up four flights past the fire regulations and biology notice-boards, over a bridge linking Science to Social Science, then down, down, down below ground again. There, at the ring of a bell, two locked doors are opened from within, into a narrow, windowless, buff-coloured basement, complete with heating pipes, girders and notice-boards. Once in, you can choose your metaphor – womb, grandmother's cellar, den of subversion: for here is "the largest and most comprehensive source of information on women in the United Kingdom, if not the World".

The rapid development in the past five years of courses and libraries devoted to women's studies may have shaken this claim, which was made in an otherwise sober and detailed account of the library in the *Assistant Librarian*, February 1979. But the statistics are certainly impressive: 45,000 books, pamphlets and leaflets, over 700 periodical titles and an uncounted mass of archive material and memorabilia. The stock is mostly in the English language, with "representative holdings" in European and other languages, and although the subject coverage ranges from adultery to zygotes, its special strength – and the basis of the library's international reputation – is in material relating to suffrage campaigns and to sexual politics in the United Kingdom from 1850 to 1939. With the Equal Opportunities Commission Library in Manchester, the Fawcett is also the publisher of a combined catalogue and feminist biography, *Bibliofem*, a bi-monthly microfiche service.

Primarily a research library, open to both sexes, its role is different from that of other specialist libraries such as the more official and limited EOC library, or the Feminist Archive at Bath which concentrates on the modern women's movement. In many ways the Fawcett, with its historical bias, complements London's other essential resource centre for women, the Feminist Library in Victoria (the new incarnation of the Women's Research and Resource Centre), which is radical, activist, women-only, and which supports a new network of research and campaigns relating to women in Britain and overseas.

It seems strange to find such a place as the Fawcett within an institution which is oriented to business studies and science and by traditional definition male, and the library's relationship to its host is, not surprisingly, complex. The original Fawcett Society Library, which was housed here on permanent loan seven years ago, is still governed by a number of small trusts, while material acquired since then belongs to the Polytechnic. At first, it was regarded as a cuckoo in the nest, but the Calcutta House Librarian is Rita Pankhurst, daughter-in-law of Sylvia, and her commitment to the Fawcett has undoubtedly lessened the early sense of isolation. (Her presence also appropriately links the memories of Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett, the two greatest leaders, and rivals, of the British suffrage movement.) But the Fawcett still remains a separate body, with its own Librarian, Catherine Ireland, and Assistant Librarian, David Doughan. Its polytechnic funds are supplemented by grants from the EOC, the Leverhulme Trust (which is paying for an archivist for three years), the ILEA (who have mounted an exhibition on Women in Science and Engineering now on tour in London), and the Sir John Cass Foundation. Additional revenue comes from endowments, sales of publications and subscriptions from a wide variety of members outside the polytechnic: schoolgirls doing "general studies" projects, members of local women's groups, novelists getting background, as well as students and academics.

The figures and the institutional facts indi-

cate the library's importance and status but fail to convey the peculiar qualities which endear it to its many devotees. These are compounded of many elements (some of which may make librarians elsewhere shudder) such as the physical atmosphere, enclosed, timeless, safe; the haphazard feel of the shelves and boxes; the notices in neo-Gothic script; the elderly women deep in papers at a corner desk. These are the cherished voluntary helpers, their average age an institutional joke, who catalogue, sort and label and whose own experience of past campaigns is almost part of the library stock. (Mrs Mathilde Schneider, a relative of Freud and an active feminist in pre-war Berlin, recently held her eighty-ninth birthday-party among the stacks and microfiches.) A sense of intimacy extends to the researchers as well as the staff. At first it is disconcerting, and distracting, to have librarians so keen to know what you are doing and why, so solicitous with advice, so evidently knowledgeable, so likely to expose huge areas of ignorance and panic. But soon the conversations become irresistible, the expertise invaluable, and through them one is in touch with a network of contacts extending around the world.

The greatest pull, of course, is exercised by the collection itself, but any description of the Fawcett's contents has to be narrative, rather than a list, for the library's shape has been determined by the idiosyncrasies of individuals and by the complexities of the women's movement since the mid-nineteenth century, rather than by any slow and careful policy of acquisitions.

The collection probably started as three or four bookcases in the headquarters of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, which was founded in 1866 and led by Millicent Fawcett until 1918. The society was at the centre of the constitutional suffrage movement, and collected books about the nature of women as well as about their rights, while also gathering pamphlets, broadsheets, posters and the many campaigning periodicals which proliferated between 1870 and 1920. During the First World War the collection expanded as the Society's interests changed, largely under pressure of the experience of training women for men's jobs – welders, drivers, farmers – and especially when, after the granting of the franchise to women over thirty in 1918, it turned from specifically political aims and concentrated on social and economic inequities and the position of women in industry and the professions. Many members were also involved in the feminist International Peace Movement and this is reflected in the library's holdings.

By 1926 the collection had become the Women's Service Library in Victoria Street, the change of name reflecting its new directions. No longer a single entity, it had already begun to absorb other smaller libraries which still retain a sense of their individual identity, like the collection built up around 1909 by Ruth Cavendish-Bentinck. Possibly reacting against the excesses of an MP relative who, in the fierce fights against regulated prostitution of the 1870s, had been dubbed the "member for the brothel-keepers", she started a lending library for suffragists, an odd mixture of old rare books, like original editions of Selden's *Uxor Ebraica* (1673) and Blackstone's *The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) and works by the progressive writers of the day, Shaw, Ibsen, Edward Carpenter. Another library incorporated in the collection is the Edward Wright library, originally a lending library for suffragists, an odd mixture of old rare books, like original editions of Selden's *Uxor Ebraica* (1673) and Blackstone's *The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) and works by the progressive writers of the day, Shaw, Ibsen, Edward Carpenter. Another library incorporated in the collection is the Edward Wright library, originally a lending library for suffragists, an odd mixture of old rare books, like original editions of Selden's *Uxor Ebraica* (1673) and Blackstone's *The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) and works by the progressive writers of the day, Shaw, Ibsen, Edward Carpenter.

A third acquisition was the Crosby Hall Collection, the result of an impulsive gesture by Nancy Astor. As the story goes, when the British Federation of University Women were getting themselves organized at Crosby Hall, Lady Astor decided that they should have a library, and promptly ordered several hundred titles. With typical tact she had consulted no one, Crosby Hall had no space, nobody wanted the collection, everyone felt patronized and so the whole load of books, still recognizable by

their distinctive bookplates, was donated to the WSL. During the 1930s the collections grew, and as the tales of the suffrage battles and the new emancipation of the Great War era became hazy memories, so the archival aspect assumed importance. Members donated their personal collections, not only books but scrapbooks, membership cards, programmes, minutes, photographs and letters. From 1927 to 1967 the Librarian, Vera Douie, nurtured these heterogeneous collections and added to them in a variety of ways. When the library was evacuated to St Anne's College Oxford, in 1940, she and the Honorary Librarian, Jane Norton, picked up bargains for five shillings in the relatively deserted Oxford bookshops. Their purchases, and the antiquarian side of the Cavendish-Bentinck Collection, meant that the Fawcett now has a hoard of early works, the first dating from 1527. First editions of the classics of feminist debate (Astell, Hays, Wollstonecraft) are shelved with many lesser known polemics, from *Women As Good as Men* (1677) or *An Essay on Old Maids, by a Friend to the Sisterhood* (1785), to *Woman! A Few Shrieks, Setting forth the Necessity of Shrieking until the Shrieks be heard*, by X (actually Constance Smedley) in 1906. The seventeenth and eighteenth-century publications also include books for rather than about women, on marriage, morals, child-rearing, fashion and housekeeping. There are also runs of magazines, journals, almanacs and whole sets of moralizing literature for children, invaluable material for students of women's lives and of the perception of femininity in past centuries.

During the Second World War, Douie also collected civil defence pamphlets and propaganda, now grist for explorations of the political manipulation of the ideology of womanhood. (One such asks "Are You Equal to Two German Women? Your opposite number in Germany has spent her year in a labour camp. Her limbs are strong, her stride is firm and her spirit is uplifted by a perverted idealism..." and so on for four pages of *Woman and Beauty*, 1942.) But, as women increasingly became aware (in Edith Summerville's words), the war was being "waged by both sexes but conducted by one". From 1943 a different kind of propaganda was collected, emerging from bodies like the Women's Publicity Planning Association in the feminist upsurge of the later war years. Indeed up to the end of the late 1940s the Library had an activist role, like the Feminist Library today but with a different bias, as a centre for middle-class liberal feminism. For example, yet another minor collection based on a special interest is the Sade Brown Collection on women's position and history in South Asia, Africa and the British Colonies, especially from 1890 to 1947, which is now held in conjunction with the Commonwealth Countries League.

After the war, homeless because of the bombing of the Women's Service House, 26,000 overdue until this debt was wiped out by Philippa Fawcett (a second reason for the present name), the library fell on hard times and was stored from 1949 to 1957 in Westminster Public Library at Great Smith Street. Then the Fawcett Society Library Trust was established, the collection moved to 27 Wilfred Street, Westminster, and began to be used by the first "modern" historians of the women's movement, Josephine Kamm, Constance Rover and Roger Fulford. It was at this stage that another of Douie's feminist activities, her membership of the grimly named Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, brought in the largest and most extraordinary of the independent collections, the Josephine Butler Library.

The Josephine Butler Library, archive and letter collection reflects what many now see as the most radical aspect of gender politics in the nineteenth century and charts the passionate campaigns on sexual behaviour which took place alongside, but never exactly merged with, the political and economic battles. These campaigns began with the fight against the regulation of prostitution by the state under the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s which was regarded initially as an attack against civil rights, making women into second-class citizens in the regulated military districts, who could be "marched from the streets", forcibly examined and incarcerated in a lock-hospital without any

representation or legal process. But the rhetoric employed by the Ladies' National Association for abolition of the acts, led by Josephine Butler from 1869, shows how the acts came to seem a symbol for male sexual oppression in general – in marriage as in prostitution or white slavery. The late flowering of the movement, after the CD Acts were repealed in 1883, took more vehement forms still, developing into a large international movement against state-regulated prostitution, and into the sexual-purity movements of the 1890s which prefigured the separatist feminist polemic of Christabel Pankhurst and her followers. Butler was at the centre of these movements for fifty years until her death in 1906, and the massive amount of material in this collection makes it a prime resource for contemporary research into the history of attitudes to sexuality, as well as in the campaigns of the period.

Butler's own writings, books, pamphlets and speeches, her militant-sounding journals, *The Shield*, *The Storm Bell*, *The Sentinel*, *The Down*, and over 2,500 of her letters, have all been put on microfiche by the Inter Documentation Company, Zurich, as part of their new project on Women's Studies Archives. But much of the collection is still not properly catalogued, or even known to its full extent. And it continues to grow – for example by the recent present of a 600-page scrapbook labelled *Social Evil Extracts*, probably compiled by Sir William Acton himself. The stacks in this section of the library side apart to reveal bundles of signed photographs of Butler at her most glamorous, fat ledgers, reports of the Egypt and India Sanitary Commission of 1870, booklets on "The Road to Buenos Ayres", copies of the *Koma Sutra* in Moroccan leather and piles of dusty box-files. A typical box, tersely marked "V.D.", discloses official reports packed alongside an orange pamphlet by Elie A. Rout entitled *Two Years in Paris*, which describes her tireless work in keeping the Anzac clean during 1915–16 by handing out "little boxes of calomel ointment and tablets of potassium permanganate" which they allegedly agreed to use "for the sake of the women and children back home".

The seduction of such shelves can waste hours of time, and so can a glance at the general periodicals, from *The Keepsake to Comopolit*. The eyes of innumerable researchers must have slid sideways from stirring articles like "My Mutiny and Hunger Strike" by Mariel Spong, to the ungovernable frivolity of the advertisements, a diversion nervously justified by the assertion that nothing reveals the complex culture of a movement better than the minutiae of the daily life of those involved. On a single page of *Votes for Women*, 1908, beneath claims for Online face cream and electrolysis, buttressed by a price list for teas, coffees and English fruits from Spicers and Ponds, there is an eye-catching advertisement for Natureform shoes, complete with diagrams of deformed feet, mysteriously headed "Votes for Women!", which contains a personal testimony from Emmaline Pankhurst who had paid 8s 9d for pairs for her "two little girls" in 1892. In the corner, among the small ads, a "Lady, leaving town, wishes to Let her Bachelor Flat in Chancery Lane". She is clearly on her way to "Favonita", Herne Bay, where she will enjoy "Golf, tennis (Recommended by two members of the W.S.P.U.), Sunny airy rooms. Personal attention. Late Dinner. Books. Weekend Specialities."

This page sums up the New Women who made the Fawcett Library – committed, bookish, professional, often of independent means, healthy and perhaps a little solemn. Their lives are documented further in the huge collection of ephemera. There are archives of societies, such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Women's Migration and Overseas Appointments Board, the British Vigilance Society (a political, not public health organization), the Six Point Group and others, and the personal papers of individual women, such as Millicent Fawcett, Maude Royle and Teresa Billington-Greig. The organization of Billington-Greig's papers is among the best undertaken by Meg Sweet, a professional archivist from the Royal Commission for Historical Manuscripts. One of the Fawcett's main headaches is how to record an open acquisitions policy with the

Concluded on page 1000

# Letters

## Greek Art

Sir, – B. F. Cook (in his review of *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography*, edited by Warren G. Moon, August 24) is not the only one to be worried about unbridled speculation in contemporary scholarship in general and classical archaeology in particular. But it is not clear where his own limits are drawn. He, it appears, is happy to judge what lay within the "intentions and concepts" of ancient artists and effectively (by pillorying Keuls's interpretation) to claim privileged access to the erotic fantasies of the fifth-century Athenian male. Perhaps he would not call this "speculation", and in such a denial he might well find support from those traditional historians of classical art who have long devoted themselves to conjuring out of misty conceptions of style and manner a whole gallery of artists, complete with the obligatory paraphernalia of schools and followers.

For those of us who remain unimpressed by such flights of fancy, the kinds of intellectual enquiry which Cook appears most to dislike offer the virtues of a certain element of restraint. At least they admit the possibility of recognizing the process by which scholarly myths and narratives – including their own – are constructed. It is worth reflecting, moreover, that the nebulous structuralist speculations viewed by Cook with such disfavour are, in contrast to Cook himself, not constrained to resort to the vague and impressionistic criteria of "conviction" and "versimilitude".

Incidentally, it is startling to learn that, while "Amazonian battle-axes" (instruments or people?) have worried themselves with the question of how and where women are defined as erotic, they should all the time have realized that it is "the women themselves" – presumably in any context whatsoever – who operate as "the mainspring of erotic fantasy".

MARY BEARD  
Newham College, Cambridge.  
CHLOE CHARL  
Department of English Literature, University of Sheffield.  
ROBIN CORMACK  
Courtauld Institute of Art, London W1.

## Roman Foreign Policy

Sir, – I have always been silent when my books have been reviewed by hostile critics. But E. Badian's account of my *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* (August 24) is another matter: one would think that he had been asked to review the brief notes and index rather than the book itself. In it, after three preliminary chapters on the historical background, I discussed in eleven chapters every forward move that the Romans made, mainly by armed intervention but also by diplomatic action, in Asia Minor, Armenia, Syria and the western zone of the Parthian empire, and the arrangements made after their conquests, from the annexation of the Asian province in 133 BC to the final settlement with Parthia in AD 1.

Instead of discussing the theme of the book Badian selects three passages covering some four pages to which he devotes the substantial part of his review. In the first I argued against his dating of the first Roman intervention – by the propagator Sulla – to Cappadocia against the influence of Mithridates to the early rather than the late 90s BC, while the second passage concerned new evidence for the establishment of a provincial zone in Cilicia (c. 101 BC). Badian simply ignores my verbal analysis of the evidence, in both cases and asserts his own opinion. In the third passage I argued against a view of Roman expenditure in 59–58 BC which Badian still supports – that the increased corn dues of Clodius in 58 exhausted the Roman treasury despite the virtual tripling of the state income by the revenues from the conquests of Pompeius, finalized in 59 BC. Even Cicero, a hostile witness, limits this expenditure to "almost" a fifth of the ample national income. Finally, my view of the federated status of "free cities", and of the trade rivalry between Rhodes and Delos, is briefly commended.

The remaining bulk of the book is merely neglected: never once does Badian acknowledge that its most central theme – the prolonged clash with the king of Pontus – has been left untouched for over thirty years since the publication of Reinach's great book on Mithridates Eupator. For the rest he criticizes

at length my deliberately selective bibliography, the rendering of initials, and the title of the book, fails to notice the existence of a scale on my maps, and makes some extremely generalized remarks about Roman history. From so distinguished a historian one expected fuller treatment, whether adverse or not.  
A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE.  
St John's College, Oxford.

## Sir Thomas Urquhart

Sir, – Robin Robbins's review (August 10) of a recent edition of my ancestor's *The Jewel* seems to me too critical of the man. Thomas Urquhart's Rabelais, which Cyril Wilkinson called "one of the greatest translations in the language", undoubtedly developed Rabelais's neology. The boastful account of Crichton *et al* in *The Jewel* should be seen, as Robbins agrees, in the light of his loss at the Fight of Worrester of all he most valued – including the reputation of the Scots. Committed to Windsor Castle as a prisoner, Urquhart was examined about what he had to offer "for the advantage of the nation". He hoped that by persuading his examiners to accept his universal language, Trissoteras ("for those who are mathematically afflicted"), he would regain his liberty and his estate.

But surely Urquhart's additional attempt to persuade the examiners (and "the nation") that he was a prodigy of the ilk of Crichton – the genius depicted in Glover's charming engraving of Urquhart seated on Helicon, honoured by all the Muses – is satirical, and consistent with his phrase in the Rabelais that "to laugh is proper to the man".  
BRUCE URQUHART of CRAIGSTON.  
Craigston Castle, Aberdeenshire.

## Dating 'Othello'

Sir, – Stanley Wells (Letters, July 20) is right in his observation that hard facts are too rare in our knowledge of the chronology of Shakespeare's works for us not to welcome a new one. But while we must be grateful to him for his discovery which throws light on the date of *Othello*, it should be noticed that though his fact is hard, the conclusion he draws from it may be questionable.

Acceptance of the influence of Knolles's *History of the Turks* on Act 1, Scene 3, of *Othello* and our new cognizance of the date in the book's epistle, "the lost of September, 1603", do not necessarily prove that, in Wells's words, "the play cannot have been written before October 1603".

Such a deduction assumes that Shakespeare composed this play in the order of the scenes as we now have them. He may, of course, have worked in this way; but before accepting that he did, we should remember that there is some evidence (see, eg Ned Allen, "The Two Parts of *Othello*", *Shakespeare Survey* 21, 1968, 13–29) which suggests that Act 1 may have been written after Acts II–V had been completed. If this is the case, then Shakespeare may have been dramatizing the domestic narrative he found in Clotio before October 1603 and used Knolles's book only when he decided to give his sexual drama the larger context of the Turkish wars by drawing on historical material which was widely known to be of special interest to the new King James. The King was the patron of Shakespeare's own theatre company and the King's Men were to present the play before him in the Banqueting House, Whitehall, on November 1, 1604.  
NORMAN SANDERS.  
Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

## Sir Arthur Sullivan

Sir, – I feel obliged to comment on R. T. Shannon's review (August 24) of Arthur Jacob's biography of Sir Arthur Sullivan.  
Mr Jacob suggests that Sullivan may have been jealous of successful foreign composers. The basis of this allegation is twofold: first, Sullivan dared to criticize the works of some of his contemporaries; second, the references in his diary to meetings with other composers are often very curious (but no more so than the references to many other events). In other words, there is no real evidence for Sullivan's "jealousy" at all, and it is quite wrong of Shan-

non to treat Jacob's hypothesis as established fact.

Shannon states that "bereft of Gilbert, Sullivan was artistically at a loss". This is, of course, nonsense: even so severe a critic as Jacob allows the merits of many of Sullivan's non-Gilbertian works. Indeed, this century's neglect of Sullivan's "serious" music derives far more from what Jacob calls "the change of public taste" than from any flaws inherent in the music itself.

Sullivan is now, according to Shannon, "stuck" and "down and out": I cannot see how he can possibly justify these curious assertions. Sullivan's character will of course survive Shannon's distorted and hostile presentation of it: his Gilbertian works are as popular as ever; and interest in his other music is increasing. It is, therefore, a pity that Professor Shannon's review did not take a more balanced and constructive look at Sullivan's character and work.

JOHN WINTERTON.  
59 New Road, Witlesey, nr Peterborough.

## Alice James

Sir, – Why does Rosemary Dinnage, in her review of *Anna O*, edited by Max Rosenbaum and Melvin Muroff (August 10), equate Alice James's illness with hysteria? She was convinced her illness was physical, and endured her deplorable health with constancy. Well aware her doctors thought her symptoms psychological, when she was told she had cancer (which she endured with great bravery) she gloried in the fact that at last she had an illness the doctors had to recognize as physical. She wrote in her diary, "Ever since I have been ill, I have longed and longed for some palpable disease, no matter how conventionally dreadful a label it might have, but I was always driven back to stagger alone under the monstrous mass of subjective sensations, which that sympathetic being, 'the medical man' had no higher inspiration than to assure me I was personally responsible for, washing his hands of me with a graceful complacency under my very nose." Surely this is not the reaction of a hysteric?

A number of significant clues in her diary, and all her symptoms, fit a diagnosis of extreme multiple allergy, a condition then unknown. As it happens, allergy was also first identified in Vienna, by von Pirquet in 1906. The existence of the condition newspapers call "total allergy syndrome" was confirmed by Drs Mike and Anquith in January 1983, so there is nothing incredible in this view of Alice James's illness. The one apparently psychological factor, that stress brought on or aggravated her symptoms, is a well-recognized syndrome in non-immunological allergy. Symptoms in this form of allergy are directly affected by the body's tolerance level. If the level is lowered by excitement or stress the trigger may be psychological but the physical symptoms that result are due to the patient's allergic condition.  
FABIENNE SMITH.  
55 Manor Place, Edinburgh.

## W. B. Yeats

Sir, – Confusions to do with Yeats seem to have abounded in your pages this year. First there was Anne Stevenson ascribing to Seamus Heaney some words famously by Yeats ("We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" – and, to set the record straight, that is the correct punctuation), and having to be put right by John Mole. Then there has been the long wrangle between Warwick Gould, Richard J. Fineran and others about *The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition*. And now there is Bernard Knox, in his review (August 24) of W. B. Stanford's *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions*, ascribing to Yeats the phrase "spin the plot", in a context which pretty clearly shows that he is confusing Yeats with Meredith (*Modern Love*, XLIII).

ANTHONY THWAITE.  
The Mill House, Low Tharston, Norwich.

Next week's *TLS* will feature Antiquarian Books and will include an article by the late Sir Geoffrey Keynes introducing and interpreting a newly discovered poem by William Blake, as well as other articles and reviews on bibliographical and book-collecting subjects.

# Basil Blackwell

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# COMMENTARY

## Tomfoolery among the gods

Warwick Edwards

PIER FRANCESCO CAVALLI  
Orion  
King's Theatre, Edinburgh

Cavalli's *L'Orione* was written for the young Habsburg Ferdinand IV, and first performed in 1653 at the Teatro Regio in Milan. Although the first of his operas to receive its première outside Venice, it does not depart radically on this account from the outstandingly successful tradition established by his earlier stage works. These were firmly aimed at a public rather than a courtly audience, one which apparently knew its Greek mythology and responded to the unfolding of new stories around familiar characters. Cavalli, for all his fertile invention and his own version of the events leading up to Orion's immortalization as a constellation in the skies. It involves all the tomfoolery among the gods we have come to expect, complete with disguise, deceptions, overhearings, comic duets and ensembles, as well as more elevated soliloquies, love duets and, of course, a lament.

It is to the credit of composer and librettist that such essential ingredients are deftly woven into a plot which, although in part predictable, is far from stereotyped. Dramatic pacing shows the sure touch of experienced hands, while the story offers ample opportunities for characterization – the dreamy but impulsive Orion with his down-to-earth comic manservant Filotero; the dignified goddess Diana and her rather less poised companion Aurora, their hearts set

afire with both desire for Orion and jealousy of each other by Cupid's poisoned arrows; Venus and her son, constantly up to more mischief but never quite knowing what the other is doing. There are some loose ends, though: Aurora's role in the drama fizzles out in Act III, and her husband Titon seems to be expendable. Whether such flaws are due to hasty preparation for the first performance or excessive zeal in cutting a somewhat lengthy entertainment down to size for modern consumption is hard to say.

Opera-goers will search *L'Orione* in vain for moments of deeper psychological penetration of the kind achieved by Busenello and Monteverdi in *Ulisse* and *Poppea*. True, the subject-matter does not lend itself particularly to such treatment. But it must also be said that Cavalli, for all his fertile invention and his wonderfully fluid movement between recitative, arioso and aria styles, lacks the irrational streak of genius that enabled his operatic predecessor to infuse his work with overwhelming intensity. Cavalli clearly knew his own public and sought to entertain rather than edify it. The point is worth stressing because it vindicates to some extent Peter Wood's lightweight production for Scottish Opera (it was originally devised for Santa Fé Opera), in which either gods or orrows constantly fly in and out, evoking titers from the audience, and costumes vary from the beautiful to the bizarre. In keeping with this approach is Raymond Leppard's irreverent English translation; but if its connection with the original sense is at times tenuous, it does at least follow the flow of the

music reasonably well and, for the most part, observes a distinction between comic and serious scenes. John Bury's seaweedy sets look a little cramped on the small King's Theatre stage, but they are effectively lit and should be seen to much better advantage when the production transfers to Glasgow's Theatre Royal in October.

Michael Myers is, both in voice and demeanour, a somewhat unalluring Orion who, to attract the rival amorous attentions of two goddesses, seems to need all the help from Cupid he can get. Anne Howells moves and sings exquisitely as Diana, contrasting effectively with Linda Ormiston's well-judged Aurora. Ann Howard and Lillian Watson make an amusing Venus-Amor pair, the former with a nice line in quick changes in and out of her gear. The general audibility of the words throughout the cast is a particularly welcome feature.

As is well known, Leppard's so-called realizations of seventeenth-century opera produce sounds, and even structures, far from anything Cavalli and his contemporaries could have envisaged. The use of a heavy modern string orchestra (as opposed to the small ensemble of solo players Cavalli wrote for) is perhaps defensible, given the relatively opaque style of singing commonly adopted on the opera stage today. But we have surely all had enough of those precious continuo effects which contribute nothing to the drama, and – what is worse – persistently divert attention from Leppard's own outstanding qualities of musical direction.

## Dangerous duplications

George Theiner

The Works of George Orwell in the Languages of Eastern Europe  
British Library until November 18

"When I read the story of Winston Smith, I received a shock because all of a sudden I realized that this was my own story I was reading", says Milan Simečka in his introduction to a recent Czech translation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. "Like Winston, I had grown up in a totalitarian system, had never been anywhere else, and lacked all certain knowledge of the past, the present, not to speak of the future. In a way I, too, was an employee of the Ministry of Truth and lived in the thrall of its ideology. Just like Winston, I knew only too well how lies were manufactured."

Milan Simečka is one of the best-known Czech dissident writers and a persistent critic of the present régime in Prague (his *Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia* is due to be published by Verso Books in September). He first read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the early 1960s, when his wife brought the "inconspicuous red Penguin" from London "in those days when it was still possible to bring

books in from abroad". "I had grown up in a world of forbidden books," he writes, "a world of omnipresent indoctrination, where the past was being rewritten all the time. In those days I of course knew nothing about the fate of Winston Smith in 1984 but, like him, succumbed to a tormenting obsession which drove me to investigate the hidden secrets of past history, to try and decipher all the coded lies, and generally to indulge in the free kind of thought that, in totalitarian societies, leads to nothing but trouble."

Trouble is the word, as Gunnars Astra and Valery Senderov (to name but two) can testify: one is Latvian, one Russian; both citizens of the Soviet Union, and both serving sentences of "seven years" very strict régime imprisonment and five years' internal exile "for having copied and distributed Orwell's famous novel. Orwell, in fact, is taboo in all the Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, with one solitary exception – that of Yugoslavia, where his *Collected Works* appeared last year, as well as an edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* this year in Slovene.

The exhibition at the British Library contains Orwell's works in eleven languages. All the Czech, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, and other versions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* on display have

been produced either by émigré publishers abroad (Paris, Stockholm, Frankfurt, Cologne and London, as well as a Hungarian translation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* broadcast by the BBC and a Romanian one by Radio Free Europe), or in samizdat at home. These are turned out in difficult and often dangerous circumstances on a variety of duplicators, as in Poland, or simply on the typewriter, which is how the Czechs circulate their "illicit" literature.

Poland easily comes top of the Orwell league, as the exhibition shows. Several underground publishing enterprises in Warsaw, Cracow, Poznan and Szczecin compete in bringing out his works, which also figure in the lists of the Paris-based Institut Littéraire; and while print runs of 10,000 are not unusual in the case of the books, the indefatigable Poles also come up with an assortment of Orwell stamps and wall stickers, as well as a calendar. Published clandestinely by NOWA last year and describing 1984 as a "sinister symbol of the victory of a uniformed world", the calendar marks "relevant anniversaries involving Big Brother (USSR) and Little Brother (Nazi Germany)". The authors come to the only partially consoling conclusion that "Orwell's vision has not been fulfilled completely so far – Little Brother has been defeated and in Europe cannot expect a resurrection. But Big Brother is marching on."

## FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS of September 6, 1934, carried a review of *A Handful of Dust* by Evelyn Waugh:

"Nadir" – Place or time of greatest depression, &c. We have the authority of the dictionary for this; and the labour of looking it out represents a small tribute to the precision with which Mr. Evelyn Waugh expresses himself. For "climax" – at any rate until it has been looked out – is associated with climbing; and while we need a word for the terminal point to which in *A HANDFUL OF DUST* (Chapman and Hall, 7s. 6d. act) he inexorably progresses, there would be, in any suggestion of ascent, an insensitiveness to the effect aimed at and produced. Whether his study of futility is worth doing and doing such length is a matter of opinion; but there can be nothing but praise for his consistency of outlook and for the grasp of purpose which rejects not only all details that might conflict with it, but any word that might be used by a shocked or sympathetic observer.

suddenly strikes in Arabic about the fare with the cabman, links herself so with the omnibusts and legless beggars it is all one, all as you have heard.

Competition No. 185:

Winner: J. Flint  
Answers:  
1. Coleridge came to while we were at dinner, very wet. We talked till 12 o'clock. He had ate up all the night before, writing Essays for the newspaper.  
Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journal*, October 4, 1800.

2. If our author's poetry is inferior to his conversation, his prose is utterly abortive. Hardly a gleam is to be found in it of the brilliancy and richness of those stores of thought and language that Coleridge pours out incessantly, when they are lost like drops of water on the ground.  
William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*.

3. Logically, metaphysically, Bard – How I have seen the casual passer through the Cloister stand still entranced with admiration. . . to hear thee, Coleridge, unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Immanuelism, or Plotinus.  
Charles Lamb, "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago".

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No. 190:  
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than September 28. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 190" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX.

1. CAIRO; that immense and sinister Woolworth's, where everything is for sale – love, lottery tickets, clothes hangers, honour, justice, indecent postcards, postboxes, disease – as much and as cheap as you like, till the buyer goes mad with boredom and guilt.  
2. They now entered the town, stunned by the noise and offended by the crowds. Instinctual had not yet so prevailed over habit but that they wondered to see themselves pass undisturbed along the streets and met, by the lowest of the people, without reverence or notice.  
3. But this stained white town.

Is something in accordance with mundane conventions – Marcelle drops her Gallic airs and tragedy

## Engagements in an ice cream war

James Campbell

Comfort and Joy  
Vnious cinemas

No tidings of comfort and joy are given to Glasgow disc-jockey Alan "Dickie" Bird when his beautiful, kleptomaniacal girlfriend walks out on him during the week before Christmas, in Bill Forsyth's latest film. She leaves without a word of warning and takes with her all the furniture, books, and pots and pans. Everything was hers, moans Alan, except the mortgage. For a few days afterwards, comfort is the bottle and joy is a painful obligation to the estimated six listeners to his morning "early worm" radio show. But Alan soon glimpses salvation in the shape of a potential gossip documentary about Glasgow's rival Italian mobs – dealing not in porn and narcotics but ice cream and fish and chips – and, more personally, in one of their number, Charlotte, played by the eyelash-fluttering C. P. Grogan in a key role as to be virtually inaudible. The different characters of the two warring factions are personified in their leaders: Roberto Bernardi plays a trim-suited Mr McCool while Alex Norton is a more Glaswegianized Mr Bunny – formerly (he stresses) Mr Softy.

Alan's motive for getting involved is threefold: he wants to make a programme about it, he wants to make peace, and he wants most of all to make Charlotte. The section fits from his denuded flat to the glass walls of the broadcasting studios of Metrosound, and between the headquarters of the two ice-cream bosses, which are made to resemble their Chicago counterparts in every respect other than their currency. There is a fair amount of violence (which results in the film's weakest moments: the tone requires the exclusion of real violence, and what we end up with is slapstick) until a pact is finally sealed over Alan's discovery of an "old Chinese recipe" for a delicacy which neatly combines both of the traditional Italian industries in Scotland.

As Forsyth now has much more money and expertise at his disposal, deservedly so, *Comfort and Joy*, like *Local Hero* before it, is more technically adroit than his first general release, *Gregory's Girl*, even if the inspiration is weaker. There is a plentiful supply of his special, childlike (but not childish) charm, but fewer moments when the whole world is revealed as a deeply serious joke. Yet there is always the feeling that the entire story – with its ice cream vendors fighting each other with raspberry sauce – would be ludicrous in the extreme if anyone but Bill Forsyth had been rash enough to film it. He purveys a palatable and comprehensible distillation of Glasgow humour without compromising an already misrepresented city. (Curiously, while the city is easily recognizable, it is never named: could it be that although it provides the material it is yet thought bad for business?)

The attractive thing about Forsyth as a writer and director is that he insists on having a lark in every scene. When Alan stays the night with a friend, bedding down in the nursery, the resident six-year-old peeps over the blankets and asks him to play a record for her on his abow: "It's for Andrew, but don't mention my name." For him, Glasgow houses a side split with laughter for every broken bone. While Alan, like other Forsyth characters, is revealed as his most vulnerable, the director's debinking instincts steer the situations clear of sentimentality.

Bill Paterson gives a typically assured performance in a role which over exercises him in the full, and Patrick Malahide is on target as the rebellious doctor-friend who helps to make him feel better. ("That's my job"). The role assigned to Burt Lancaster in *Local Hero* is here taken by Rikki Fulton, who plays the president of Metrosound. He thinks Alan is going insane when he hears that he wants to make a programme about ice cream, as anyone else would have done before the unusual talent of Bill Forsyth was discovered.

## Exactions of the theatre

Alan Jenkins

SAMUEL BECKETT  
Ohio Impromptu, What Where and Catastrophe  
Dannar Warehouse

"The sun shone, having no alternative, on the squalid new"; thus the opening words of *Murphy* (1938). There is no sunlight in any of these three plays by Samuel Beckett, directed by the late Alan Schneider, performed by the Harold Clurman Theatre of New York; but that in itself is almost an assurance that the scheme of things in Beckett's universe remains undisturbed. The pieces are very short, and ostensibly very gloomy, as we might expect; but in their economy of exquisite precision and, well, economy, the smallest local effects are infinite riches, the subtlest shift of emphasis comes with the force of a sizeable tremor.

*Ohio Impromptu* (so titled because written, rumour has it, to order, for performance at a Beckett seminar at Ohio State University) presents another of Beckett's "pseudo-couples", pseudo in that they are not, properly speaking, fanned of two persons, but dramatize the divided self; here, the self split between speech and listening (as in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Comment c'est*, *That Time*, *Company*) and, in its relation with language, between words as torment and as relief – of a kind (as in the fiction and plays *passim*). Two figures, immensely old (identical flowing white hair-dos, wizened faces partly hidden by hands, identical postures of utter weariness) sit at a table, one reading aloud from a book, the other signalling by knuckle-taps the points at which repetition and recapitulation are required – less a question of fidelity to be savoured or memories to be cherished than of ghosts to be exorcized. Reader reads what is, by implication, Listener's tale, the "sad tale" beginning when

In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far back . . . Out to where nothing ever shined. Back to where nothing ever shared. From this he had once half hoped some measure of relief might flow.

It doesn't, and instead, after a recurrence of "his old terror of night", "with redoubled force the fearful symptoms", she of "the dear face . . . the dear name" intercedes for him, sending "a man" (Reader, we are free to gather) to comfort him by reading till dawn.

So it goes on, "from time to time unheralded he would appear to read the sad tale through again and the long night away" until whatever comfort is to be had has been had, "no need to go to him again, even were it in your power", and the two of them are left (we have witnessed, presumably, the final one of these occasions: "Little is left to tell . . . Nothing is left to tell"), silent, "as though turned to stone". Buried in who knows what profounds of mind. Of mindlessness. "That is how we leave

them, except that we do know, or can imagine. The piece might almost be, in miniature – though without a trace of the preciosity or ornamentation suggested by that word – an episode from Dante (the two poets, the absent and ambiguously merciful she). It brings to English audiences for the first time the perfectly-attuned, infinitely tentative voice of David Warllow, whose pitch, pace and every inflection make Beckett's sentences sound as though they had been waiting for him to speak them.

*What Where*, another Dantesque piece, consists of the mathematically choreographed comings and goings of four figures, Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom – again identically ancient and barely distinguishable – from the surrounding obscurity into and out of a patch of dim light. Here they enact a recurring cycle of interrogation and cruelty (comic relief attaches to the phrase, incongruously colloquial in these gravely formal proceedings, "Give him the works") in an attempt to extract from one another some "confession" as to "what" and "where". Meanwhile the voice of Bam, who seems to be in charge of this solemn square dance, utters, from a megaphone suspended above the stage, a terse commentary on the action, gives directions, notes botched starts and records the passing of time. His almost-last words "Make sense who may" are not entirely playful.

The centrepiece of the evening, and, with *Rockaby*, the most memorable of Beckett's recent works for the stage, is *Catastrophe*, dedicated to the proscribed, formerly imprisoned Czech playwright Václav Havel, first published in English in *Index on Censorship* and performed at the 1982 Avignon festival. It shows a tyrannical Director and his assistant putting the finishing touches to a theatrical production: the perfecting of their "catastrophe", a non-person, a hapless Protagonist who is brought by small brutal degrees to resemble the representative victim, ready for public display. It shows the silencing of the artist ("Sure he won't utter? Not a squeak?") by the totalitarian state; the self-defeating nature of systematic inhumanity, of treating persons as things, the paradox by which the exercise of power to the violation of another's dignity contains its own moral downfall; it shows, also, the painful exactions of the theatre, the ambivalent, never-innocent designs of the artist on his human material. This time it is the face of David Warllow, raised, at the very end, in blinking, twitching, uncomprehending misery and terror, which silences the "audience" (his recorded "storm of applause"). Barely an affirmation, but a sign of minimal, stubborn persistence, it is one of the most affecting moments in the theatre since the Auditor's simple, repeated gesture of "helpless compassion" in Beckett's *Not I*; as this more recent play is Beckett's most direct elaboration of that compassion, his irreducible, enduring theme.

## Murder of an invisible man

John Orr

CHARLES FULLER  
A Soldier's Play  
Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh

The North-South divide in American life has been a long-standing preoccupation in black American literature, from the work of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison through to the novels of Toni Morrison. Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play*, performed by the Negro Ensemble at the Edinburgh Festival, varies the theme by creating a dramatic thriller with an unusual perspective, focusing as it does on a company of black American soldiers with white officers stationed in a small town in Louisiana in 1943. The company, in charge of chemical smoke generating machines, is waiting to embark for the coming invasion of Europe, but life at home has drama enough. Fuller recasts the conventional stage murder investigation as a sociological thriller, setting up false leads and red herrings to keep the audience guessing before giving, with the dis-

covery of the soldier responsible for the murder of the black company sergeant, a deeper social reality than that suggested by the average detective story and, parenthetically, the white liberal conscience.

The style of the play borrows to equal amounts from the Hollywood detective story and Arthur Miller. It starts with the murder, then moves forward to introduce the outside investigator, a black Captain with credentials as a lawyer in civilian life. Then through each of his interrogations it deals in flashback with the events leading up to the sergeant's death. The investigator, played by Geoffrey Ewing, is saved from the clichéd earnestness of a Siseoy Polter by a laconic irony reminiscent in part of Alfieri, the lawyer in *A View from the Bridge*, yet tougher and more abrasive in countering prejudice against his appointment. But the main conflict, which produces the most powerful acting, is between the murdered sergeant (played by the director Douglas Turner Ward) and the blues-singing Mississippi private (Larry Riley). What starts out, a bit like *In the Heat of the Night*, as a study of injustice and white racism evolves into something more complex,

# COMMENTARY

## Instruments of persuasion

Graham Bradshaw

BERTOLT BRECHT  
Galileo Galilei  
J. W. von GOETHE  
Scenes from Faust  
King's Theatre, Edinburgh

The trouble with theatre, Joseph Conrad once remarked, is that it has an inferior little poetic all of its own. After having to endure the witless, offensive extravagance of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Merchant of Venice* in the previous week, I found the austerity of the Berliner Ensemble's *Galileo Galilei* more than ever welcome. The Ensemble's 1956 production was supervised by Brecht himself, and included elaborate designs by Caspar Neher; a conspicuous feature of this new production (which actually dates from 1978) is its rejection of Neher's period atmospherics – the Renaissance portraits, maps, models and other trills. This Galileo wears an academic's baggy cardigan, and the issues he confronts or refuses to confront are all the more pressingly contemporary for being divested of period baggage. The stage is a stark, bright platform; attention is entirely concentrated on the word, the gesture, and the various encounters.

In the famous 1947 New York production with Charles Laughton, a backcloth projection showed some of the Inquisition's preferred instruments of persuasion, in the scene where Galileo's associates wait to learn whether he will recant. Here, even that restrained point-making was superfluous: Arno Wyzniewski's glacially intent, urbane Cardinal Inquisitor was more terrifying than any backcloth projection – and the tension of the thirteenth scene was quite extraordinary. As Virginia's prayers rose to a demented racing gabble, Galileo's associates communed in a tight, agonized huddle; finally the bells rang, the recantation was heard, and the barely recognizable Galileo entered, stumbling blindly across the stage. Brecht the director might have objected to the searing, shaming pathos of that moment, but in making it equally difficult to censure or indulge, Brechtard Schall's entrancingly complex characterization was faithful to Brecht the dramatist. *The Discorsi* would never have been written if Galileo had not disappointed Andrea: Andrea's heartbroken reproach, "Unhappy the land that has no heroes", and Galileo's reply, "Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes", both took their full weight, framing the human and intellectual dilemma. Schall was the Andrea in 1956; he is by now one of the greatest actors in Europe.

Two nights later, the curtain rose on an underworld of Muslim tents and surgical apparatus. A bandaged Prometheus exchanged words with his daughter Pandora while centaurs and demons scurried about; coffins

zoomed overhead on a conveyor belt which eventually delivered a dead baby in a bucket (from the well, I assume). Images of horrors and atrocities were projected onto a screen, to establish that God is, as Woody Allen has instructed us, an under-schiever. A donkey was crucified, and its sperm was collected in another bucket. Somebody began declaiming "Hab nun ach die Philosophie!" with all the feeling of a schoolboy on detention: Faust had taken Prometheus' place in the bed, where he soon received a particularly vicious enema to the strains of "Ach Gott die Kunst ist lang / Und Kurz ist unser Leben!" The enema didn't improve his verse-speaking, but perhaps explained the complete absence of any sense of Faustian "striving". While Mephisto gave a Student the low-down on universities a dripping skeleton was wheeled on, with wings and penis intact; the penis went into another basin, but my view of what happened to it after that was obscured by a pretty birdcage. Alas, the Cult of the Director had hit Berlin too; we were watching what should have been called – but then would anybody go? – *Horst Sager's Visionen über Goethes "Ur-Faust"*.

Instead of cuts there was an extraordinary *melange* of interpolations, from *Faust-Paraphrasen*, *Satyros*, *Pandora*, *Prometheus* and even Klopstock's *Messiah*. Screens unfolded to impart other information – explaining that Gretchen is pregnant before Faust seduces her, or invoking the Virgin Mary as *prima Pandora* in order to associate Gretchen with both. And there was an endless proliferation of "business", much of it running directly counter to Goethe's text.

Many of Sager's flights of fancy derive, I suspect, from a determination to develop hints or ambiguities in the text in a Teutonically literal fashion. Faust says that the apirits are all around, so we see them scurrying everywhere. The Erdgeist associates Faust with "dem Geist, den du begreifst", so we see Faust kissing and embracing Mephisto. The Erdgeist's provocation is obscure, so why not take up Goethe's idea of giving him a huge head and magic lantern, while placing him in a supernatural world in which distinctions between good and evil have no meaning; and in which the Virgin goes to meet with Mephisto to return his jewels? Gretchen's "Es was ein König" betrays her sexual desire, so let her fondle her thighs and groin. She will redeem Faust, so why not identify her early on with the *mater dolorosa* to whom she prays – and with Pandora, since that association "parallels" the association between Faust and Prometheus? At some moments the production did establish the ambivalence which made Goethe remark to Boisseree in 1815 that "Nature is an organ on which God plays, while the devil works the bellows". But again and again the failure to integrate the "business" and the sometimes stunning effects with Goethe's dramatic text simply made for tediousness, obscurity or heavy-handedness.

prototype of the new negro because he has abandoned the kind of pride he accuses his fellow-blacks of lacking. He is doomed to lose his racial identity, to become an "invisible man".

The imaginative use of historical retrospect gives the play its cutting edge and raises it above the conventional formula of the murder mystery. The bare, minimal stage-set of the soldier's quarters evokes the sparseness of army life and also gives a greater freedom, to the ensemble style of the company. As a result the pace and power of the all-male cast are highly compelling, and produce an excellent piece of group theatre.

One hopes that in future such writing for ensemble work will flourish and produce something more ambitious than Fuller's play in going beyond the conventional genres of stage performance. The more complex interplay of social relationships in a domestic as well as an institutional setting outside the all-male environment would not only be a challenge to this kind of company but also a welcome shot in the arm to the languishing state of the American theatre.

John Orr



# Basically fundamentalist

J. D. Gurney

ANTHONY PARSONS  
The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979  
160pp. Cape. £8.95.  
0234 021966  
SUROSH IIRFANI  
Iran's Islamic Revolution: Popular liberation  
or religious dictatorship?  
270pp. Zed. £18.95 (paperback, £6.95).  
086232 1570  
CHERYL BENARD and ZALMAI KHALILZAD  
"The Government of God": Iran's Islamic  
republic  
240pp. New York: Columbia University Press.  
\$25.  
0231 053762

Much of what has been written about Iran in the 1970s and the Revolution still seeks to explain or justify particular actions and policies, either of individuals, foreign powers or internal political groups. Sir Anthony Parsons's *The Pride and the Fall* is no different in this respect. Its author came to Tehran as ambassador just after the oil price increase at the end of 1973 and stayed until a few days after the Shah finally left Iran in January 1979. No doubt prevented by the Official Secrets Act from revealing the minutiae of diplomatic activity in those critical years, he gives an impressionistic survey based on what he reported at the time. It is a straightforward, honest account, quickening the reader's interest in the denouement of the last months when Parsons describes the realistic, sensible advice he gave to a broken man whom he had grown to like and admire "as he faced with sangfroid, objectivity, humour and above all with humanity the successive waves of crisis which were eventually to batter down his defences". The book was written, as he puts it, to "exorcise the memory" of these events, perhaps to lay the ghost of Pahlavi reproach, tersely voiced in the Shah's *Answer to History*. But Parsons also has weightier motives, directed to a wider explanation of how, like everyone else, he misjudged the stability of the Pahlavi regime, misunderstood the Shah's personality, and failed to anticipate the strength of the revolutionary forces and their rejection of the values of Pahlavi Iran.

It might be thought that this failure could be attributed to Parsons's deliberate policy of breaking away from the usual image of British and Iranian relations. In the minds of most Iranians, the dominant external influence on the course of Iranian history has been that of the English, an influence occasionally beneficial, but usually malevolent, Machiavellian, and subversive. From the start Parsons wanted to normalize relations, avoid clandestine contacts, and bury the past. With that in mind, he deliberately switched key staff away from political to commercial work; the embassy was primarily organized as an agency for the promotion of British exports. Study of the internal political situation was important but subsidiary. Yet, in his view, the miscalculation did not lie here. It was not lack of information, but rather its misinterpretation, "like looking down the night telescope but focussed on the wrong target". All the elements that contributed to the Revolution had been located: "Where we went wrong was that we did not anticipate that the various rivals, each of which had a different reason for resenting the Shah's rule, would combine into a mighty stream of protest which would eventually sweep the Shah away." A correct reading of Iranian history, Parsons claims, should have prevented this. The protests against the Rouster concession in 1973, against the Tobacco Regie in 1891-2, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, all show the same combination of religious leaders, *bazarris* and intellectuals who united and employed the same tactics which neutralized the Shah's power base of the armed forces and security services. In 1978, history had repeated itself, and if Parsons had drawn the appropriate lesson from Iran's past and not generalized so much from his experience in the Arab world and Turkey, he believes, he might have anticipated events more accurately.

Historical parallels at this level of generalization are meaningless. Superficial similarities exist, but the differences are more striking, especially the involvement of the urban

leadership in the later 1970s. It is especially Parsons's silence on this last topic, a profound change fermenting beneath the surface of Iranian society, that raises doubts as to the accuracy and perceptiveness of the information reaching the ambassador's desk. At times it sounds as if he had come to believe the Pahlavi's own propaganda: that "there has been only one revolution in Iran since the sixteenth century, namely that carried out by Reza Shah Pahlavi and built upon by his son"; that "there had been a genuine severance with the immediate pre-Pahlavi past"; that the Shah needed only to replace the traditional bazar economy with a modern sector, and thereby neutralize the Shi'i religious leadership and destroy their network of religious organizations, but he had neither the strength nor the will in a relentless race against time to do this. In consequence, according to this view of Iranian history, those twin pillars of reaction that had dominated Iranian society for hundreds of years, the Shi'i hierarchy and the bazar merchants, have now established a counter-revolutionary regime which bears "a remarkable resemblance to that of Iran in the eighteenth century". Such comments and generalizations encourage the suspicion that the splendid Anglo-Indian ambassadorial residence, with its wistaria-covered walls, sheltered by tall plane trees, an oasis in the crowded centre of modern Tehran, was as much out of touch with fundamental elements in Iranian society as the Niavaran Palace, with its soft-footed servants in their coat-tails and deferential aides-de-camp.

One of these unrecognized developments is the subject of Surosh Irfani's *Revolutionary Islam in Iran*, a study of the "progressive Islamic movement" from Afghanistan through to Iqbal and its re-emergence in Iran in the middle decades of this century with Bazarqan, Taleqani and Ali Shariati. It was men such as these who represented "the dynamic spirit of radical Islam" in contrast to the static dogma imposed in the name of Islam by the Shi'i establishment, more luridly described as the "cancerous web of the compromising men of the religious bazar". This continuum is paralleled at the

level of political action by another, from Mirza Kuchek Khan (now upgraded to "the first progressive revolutionary in contemporary Islamic history"), to Mosaddeq (Khomeini's uprising of 1963), and finally the Mujahidin from the late 1960s onwards. Though the author shows considerable disdain for historical accuracy, some profit can be derived from his partisan account if it is read as a summary of the views of the Mujahidin, probably the best organized of the opposition groups ranged against the Islamic Republic. Most of the sources are taken directly from their literature and it is their interpretation of the ideas of Taleqani and Shariati, and of the contribution of the guerrilla groups to the Revolution, that is faithfully reproduced here. For those able to pick a way through the hyperbole and confused analysis, the extracts from prison recollections and other documents are moving testimonies to the courage many showed in a cause that is never clearly defined or explained.

It is here that the opening chapters of "The Government of God": Iran's Islamic republic make such a valuable contribution to the literature on the Iranian Revolution. The authors, both political scientists, are concerned to explain why their discipline so seriously misjudged the situation in Iran, neglecting what was happening until the last moment. In a lively, lucid review of prevailing development theories, and the subsequent response of theory to the events in Iran, they suggest how a possible synthesis of divergent strands within mainstream modernization and dependence theory might have provided a more relevant framework for understanding Iranian society. A subsequent chapter explains why political activity found an Islamic articulation, suggesting that unlike in early modern Western societies, religion was part of the beleaguered national culture, threatened by external forces and, together with other important elements in society, thwarted by a secularist government. The responses in contemporary Islamic society have taken different forms, and four ideal-typical categories, of secularist Westernizer, Islamic modernist, traditionalist and fun-

damentalist, are discussed. These change according to circumstances; amongst groups and individuals there is considerable mobility: groups can form tactical alliances, individuals move from one category to another at different times and over different issues. Khomeini's own transition from a traditionalist to a fundamentalist position is analysed, and the temporary dialogue between the traditionalists and fundamentalists is well illustrated by a comparison of his views with those of Shariati.

Another essay on prejudice as a cultural weapon discusses Orientalism and Occidentalism. Under the first heading the travelogue genre and recent British and American attitudes towards Iranians are cleverly dissected, suggesting that besides the usual colonial condescension and disdain, fear also lay never far beneath the surface - a nervous incomprehension hinted at in Parsons's description of the Iranian people in general as "scurly, lacklustre and neurotic" and the streets of Tehran as "neurotic, teeming and grimy". Likewise, under the heading of Occidentalism, fundamentalist prejudices are amusingly discussed, especially views on morality based on an eclectic range of evidence from tapped telephone-lines in New York that reveal the promiscuity of American housewives to statistics on the number of children bitten by dogs in various Western capitals.

The second half of the book is a more conventional survey of the different phases of the Islamic Republic's consolidation, the shared power between the fundamentalists and others, the fundamentalist triumph, domestic problems and policies, external relations and chances of survival. Though at times the source material seems slight and there are some inaccuracies of detail, these sections too provide a framework for discussion. It is the analytic elements that make this one of the more intelligent studies written about contemporary Iran. The authors have certainly raised the level of debate and brought some kind of order into the questions surrounding "one of the pivotal events of our time".

land of E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who made the Southern Sudan the locus classicus of Oxford anthropology, as the coming of a new prophet, but he scarcely employs the insights generated by anthropologists who have worked in the Sudan (in contrast with D. H. Johnson, whose exemplary work on the Nile prophets Collins cites). He has interviewed many of the surviving DCs - he is no stranger to oral history - and consulted files in the remotest areas. It is a pity he did not sit down more often with the elders there. Now no one can: the destruction of the fragile accord between North and South and the outbreak of a new civil war has curtailed both kinds of research. For the time being students of the Sudan must be thankful for what they have got.

## In microform

*Islam-Fiche* is the general heading of a micro-fiche collection of primary materials in English translation which document the history, religion and culture of Islamic civilization, published by Inter Documentation Company of Switzerland. Planned as the first of a series of collections, it contains forty-nine text selections, chosen from both published and unpublished sources, grouped according to general themes. These include biography and memoirs, devotional and liturgical literature, Hadith, sciences, legal and commercial texts, Quran-related literature and poetry and fiction.

Projects of related interest from the same publishers include a collection of roughly 20,000 photographs from the photo-archives of the Middle East Centre of St. Antony's College, Oxford (*Historical Photographs of the Middle East*) and *Palestinian Newspapers in the Arabic Language*, consisting of Arab newspapers which appeared in Palestine from the period of the British mandate to the present. Information about these collections and others can be had from the publishers, IDC, Palestine, P.O. Box 100, Ramat Gan.

# Imperialism, socialist style

M. E. Yapp

WM ROGER LOUIS  
The British Empire in the Middle  
East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United  
States, and postwar imperialism  
803pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £45.  
0198224893

The subject of this large and important book is the attempt of the post-war Labour Government to establish new and stable foundations for British influence in the Middle East and the almost complete failure of that attempt. The architect of the proposed political system was Ernest Bevin: its watchwords were economic and political partnership.

Neither the concept of economic nor that of military partnership was as novel as Wm Roger Louis appears to suggest. Ideas of co-operation in economic development between Britain and the Middle Eastern states had grown out of the wartime experience of the Middle East Supply Centre and were set out in 1943 by Richard Casey, who proposed a Middle East Economic Council, a suggestion approved in principle by the War Cabinet. The ideas were further enlarged through reports and conferences culminating in the Fayyum conference of April 1945 and were urged on the Cabinet by Edward Grigg. Ideas of cooperation in the defence of the Middle East sprang from the work of Middle East Command and of the Post Hostilities Planning Staff which reported in March 1945 that "our relations with the Middle East states must ensure their co-operation in peace and war". In the plan subsequently put forward by Sir Bernard Paget co-operation took the form of a Middle East Confederacy and a Middle East Defence Council. What Bevin did was to bring these ideas together in a curious and unbalanced combination.

The objectives of the economic programme are instructive to contemplate. For Labour, Professor Louis shows, economic development had both an ethical and a utilitarian purpose. British dominance would be justified if it resulted in an enhancement of the standard of living of the peoples of the region. But the benefits must go to the people and not to the Pashas (in the familiar phrase of the time).

Therefore, by their advice to governments British diplomatic representatives were to try to ensure that the rewards went to the deserving poor. In turn the grateful poor would be less susceptible to the attractions of communist propaganda. Further, the British economy and people would also benefit from increased commerce with the Middle East and from the proceeds of investments, especially in oil. And again, a prosperous Middle East would form a strong shield for Africa, the economic development of which continent would also produce dividends for the peoples of Africa and Britain.

This comical hotch-potch of mid-Victorian imperialism and mid-twentieth-century socialism, suffused with the clear light of economic, political and strategic innocence, was to serve yet another purpose by softening the image of British colonialism in the United States and helping to enlist the support of that country for British policies in the Middle East.

The economic programme was redeemed by one circumstance: there was no money to pay for it. Britain could provide only a small amount of technical assistance for the Middle East and was most reluctant to release the frozen sterling balances which might have permitted the Middle Eastern countries to pay for it themselves. Contemplating the reality behind the vaulting ambition of the economic programme it is not unreasonable to conclude that the economic face of the new British imperial policy was primarily for public inspection and that it was military partnership which was at the heart of British policy in the Middle East.

The greatest part of Louis's book is devoted to the implementation of Bevin's policy and as soon as one moves into this area an apparent contradiction becomes evident. The policy was regional but the implementation was sought through bilateral agreements with the various states. Of course, it could be argued that the contradiction was not important and that the bilateral arrangements were to be within the framework of the regional policy. But the problem is deeper than that argument suggests. The two elements of Bevin's plan had come from organizations institutionally obliged to think in regional terms because they were created for that purpose. But, from the beginning, powerful voices within the Foreign

Office were raised against the regional approach and these voices insisted that the problems of each Middle Eastern country were so different one from another as to make only bilateral arrangements feasible. Pushed far enough this objection could make a Middle East policy a nonsense. Louis's book tends to confirm that this is exactly what happened because the original conception of a Middle East policy becomes increasingly blurred as he examines the fortunes of British policy in the Northern Tier, Syria and Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya and Eritrea, Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine and Iran.

In this review there is no space to comment on Louis's treatment of British policy in all these countries. The story he tells is an enthralling one: he sets out a vast panorama of the British official mind as it played on the various parts of the region; illuminates it with portraits of the dominant personalities; and displays a fine sensibility in recording the impact those personalities made on those with whom they had to deal. The author has used the British archives with great industry and has produced a work which may be read with pleasure and profit by students of the Middle East, of British foreign policy, and of the imperial saga.

Although the largest single section of the book is devoted to the Palestine question, one feels that his allocation is at least partly in deference to American notions of priorities. For it was clear at the time that the key to the success or failure of Bevin's policy was in Egypt, not in Palestine; and the real test of it came in 1946, during the abortive negotiations for the revision of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, not in 1947-8 with the partition of Palestine. In Egypt was the Canal Zone base and, in the face of all the exasperation expressed by the Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff insisted that there was no substitute for that base; if Bevin wanted them to defend the Middle East, he must secure British control of the Canal base. But Sir Ronald Campbell and Lord Stansgate in Egypt advised Bevin that he could not secure British control by agreement and that he might have great difficulty in imposing it by force. Britain, they said, should concede the principle of evacuation of the base, and rely on Egyptian goodwill.

Bevin and the Cabinet chose evacuation and took the fateful step of announcing the decision in Parliament. In retrospect this announcement can be seen to have been one of three serious errors in the negotiation, for an important bargaining point had been surrendered in advance and there could be no going back. The other two errors were the decision to proceed with the negotiations without the participation of the most powerful Egyptian political party, the Wafd, a circumstance which exposed the Egyptian Prime Minister, Isma'il Sidqi, to attack from that quarter if he made any concession; and Stansgate's agreement to postpone discussion of the Sudan question until the purely Egyptian matters had been agreed. As a result, when the Sudan question was considered Stansgate had nothing left with which to bargain and it was over the Sudan that the negotiations broke down. With the failure of his notable and serious effort to win the goodwill of moderate Egyptian nationalism Bevin's policy had suffered a grievous blow. With Egyptian co-operation something might have been achieved in Palestine or Iraq; without it Bevin had to struggle to salvage something in Transjordan and Cyrenaica.

It was once fashionable to blame the failure of Bevin's Middle East policy on the failure of the United States to support him. As Louis shows, it is difficult to sustain this thesis in relation to Palestine. It is even more difficult to do so in relation to Egypt; the only sign of United States pressure is in the suggestion that concessions to Egypt would make it easier to stand up to the Soviets in Iran. But Bevin did not need to be told this.

Bevin's policy failed because it was unrealistic; Britain could offer nothing worth having in return for acceptance of British predominance. Bevin was deceived by the spectacle of the fortuitous British influence achieved during the Second World War; a study of the inter-war period might have taught him more of what it was possible for Britain to sustain. He was also deceived by arguments about the importance of the Middle East; on the one hand, if the Middle East was no longer necessary for the defence of India, could it seriously be argued that it was required for the protection of Tanganyikan ground nuts and Gambian eggs?

# Instead of the Sassanians

Hugh Kennedy

MICHAEL G. MORONY  
Iraq after the Muslim Conquest  
689pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press.  
£39.50.  
0691 039952

"Every first generation Muslim", Michael Morony reminds us, "was a former pagan, Magian, Jew or Christian", and this obvious but often neglected fact is the basis of the argument of *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*. The author maintains that we cannot understand the development of early Muslim politics, administration, social life or even religious attitudes and practices without looking at the ideas which preceded them. Since, he goes on to argue, most of the formative developments took place in Iraq, we must investigate the nature of late Sassanian Iraq and the features which were carried on from the old regime to the new.

Professor Morony aims at a sort of total history. He does not restrict himself to politics, or the doings of the Sassanian and early Islamic elite, nor even to the administrative and fiscal structures which supported them. He tries to go deeper than this, to examine the fortunes and attitudes of groups whose doings rarely appear in the chronicles, and questions such as the nature of paganism, the dying embers of the worship of Bel and Ishtar, which had begun with the Sumerians, the theories of magic and the practices of sorcery. He is concerned to exploit a wide variety of sources and show himself master of the intricacies of Sassanian-Arab culture and the secrets of the incantation bowls of Nippur. These interests give his account of Iraq a three-dimensional quality, one lacking from

their concern for royal personages or the heroes of early Islam.

The implications of the book are far-reaching. Morony stresses the debt early Islamic administrators owed to their Sassanian predecessors and suggests some of the ways in which this influence was transferred; Arabic was, after all, one of the administrative languages of late Sassanian Iraq and both officials and procedures continued to work under the new dispensation. He emphasizes that it was in Iraq, notably during the governorate of Ziyad b. Abhi (669-73), that the main outlines of Islamic government practice were developed and he credits Ziyad with a central role in recruiting those who had served the Sassanian crown.

In this he may be putting too much trust in his sources; Islamic historiography soon developed the topos of the hero as bureaucrat, the great administrator whose words and deeds served as an example for his later successors, and the attribution of a practice to Ziyad may simply be a way of establishing its antiquity. This does not, however, invalidate Morony's argument; even if Ziyad himself were not the only formative individual, there can be no doubt that he, his contemporaries and immediate successors left a mark on the Islamic polity which was never entirely erased.

Sassanian influence led Islamic governors to dispense with some of the traditional Arab features which had distinguished the government of the *umma*, the Muslim community, in Medina in the early years. Among these was the question of law enforcement. Arabian tribal practice depended on the blood feud and the harsh laws of retaliation, *kin* against *kin*. Muhammad had modified this, encouraging the acceptance of compromise and blood money, but execution of justice was still a family responsibility. It was in Iraq under Ziyad's

rule that the Islamic government first claimed a monopoly of force, and the maintenance of peace and the pursuit of criminals became a matter for the authorities. Of course the change was not as simple and clear-cut as that but the issue is central; it is arguable that the early Islamic state only came into existence when it acquired a monopoly of force, and it was in Iraq, during the rule of Ziyad and under the influence of Sassanian practice, that such monopoly was established. The argument can be extended to other areas of state activity.

The nature of religious continuity is less obvious. For some of the non-Muslim population, the coming of Islam meant little change. The Manicheans, persecuted under the Sassanians, were persecuted with equal determination by the Muslims. The main shift was the collapse of the Zoroastrian state religion, which virtually disappeared in Iraq. Islam attracted some of its adherents but so, interestingly, did Christianity, and there may actually have been an increase in the number of Christians in Iraq after the Muslim conquest. Clearly there was a fundamental discontinuity between Islam and the previous religions of the area and Morony brings out some interesting aspects of this - the fact, for example, that Islam did not take over the holy places of previous cults. Although there was some continuity in ascetic ideas between Christianity and early Islam, it is remarkable that the new religion produced none of the miracle-working holy men who were so central to the Christian religious experience of the fifth and sixth centuries. Some underlying structures may have survived; the idea of the small, exclusive religious community, which finds its early Islamic expression in the Kharijites, and the practice of asceticism as a form of opposition to establish authorities and values, were among them.

rich in insights and information as this. It is also sensible and down-to-earth. In recent years there has been something of a trend in Britain to see early Islamic history as more problematical than it is, to see the sources as a complex allegory, or else a systematic conspiracy to disguise an unpalatable truth. Morony implicitly rejects this over-sceptical approach and the result is refreshingly realistic and plausible.

Of course it is always possible to point to omissions. There is little consideration of general economic or demographic change. The question of whether the coming of Islam led to decreased prosperity in rural areas and whether, as has been suggested, the conquest saw the beginning of a move away from the countryside and the concentration of the population in large urban centres, has not been considered adequately. Furthermore the emphasis on Iraq leads to a certain distortion; there is no consideration of parallel processes in Syria or Egypt, where the patterns of continuity and change are just as striking. But these criticisms should not detract from the appreciation of a work which, in both its learning and its ideas, is a major contribution to late antique and early Islamic historiography.

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John D. Gurney



## Letter to Omar

1.

I stood beside the ghastly tomb they built for you  
And shuddered with vicarious, mute guilt for you—  
Are concrete columns what they thought you meant?  
I wanted wine, a glass turned down, drops spilt for you.

A sick child reads (his life is not imperilled)—  
He sucks the candied death-wish of FitzGerald;  
I was that child, and your translated words  
Were poetry—the muse's gaudy herald.

Was it for you I answered that advertisement  
Before I knew what coasting through one's thirties meant?  
If so I owe my wife and child to that  
Old itch to get at what your Englished verses meant.

Thus in your land I doled out Shakespeare, Milton—  
Decided I preferred sheep's cheese to Stilton  
But knew as much of Persia or Iran  
As jet-lagged fat cats sluicing at the Hilton.

My language teacher was a patient Persian Jew  
(I pray that he survives), a techno-person who  
Thought faith and verse *vieux-jeu*; he thought me weird—  
He learnt my loyalties and his aversion grew.

Love proved the most effective learning lure and not  
His coaxing tact; my girl required the score and plot  
Explained in halting, pidgin syllables—  
Of our first opera (which was—aply—*Turandot*).

When I had said, in crabbed words bare of ornament,  
What *La Bohème*, *The Magic Flute* and *Norma* meant  
She married me; my Persian was still bad  
But now I knew I knew what 'nessun dorma' meant,

We set up home . . . but I feel more than sure you  
Would nod assent to Dr Johnson's poor view  
Of tulip streaks (damn all particulars . . .)  
And desist—I wouldn't want to bore you.

2.

You left the busy trivia unspoken;  
Haunted by vacancy, you saw unbroken  
Miles of moonlight—time and the desert edge  
The high-walled gardens, man's minute, brief token.

And if I revelled in your melancholy  
(Like mooching through the rain without a broody)  
It was the passion of your doubt I loved;  
Your castigation of the bigot's folly.

Besides, what could be more perversely pleasant  
To an ascetic, hungry adolescent  
Than your insistent *carpe diem* cry  
Of let conjecture go, embrace the present?

And so I set out (I thought so then; I think so now)  
In stanzas of such finely-wrought, distinct know-how  
They were my touchstone of the art (it is

Such fierce uncertainty and such precision!  
That fateful metre mated with a vision  
Of such persuasive doubt . . . grandeur was your  
Decisive statement of our indecision.

Dear poet-scholar, would-be alcoholic  
(Well, is the wine—or is it not—symbolic?)  
You would and would not recognize the place—  
Succession now in a quasi-apostolic,

The palace is a kind of Moslem Deaoery,  
But government, despite this shift of scenery,  
Stays as embattled as it ever was—  
As individual, and as sanguinary.

The warring creeds still rage—each knows it's wholly right  
And welcomes ways to wage the martyrs' holy fight;  
You would not know the names of some new sects  
But, as of old, the nation is bled slowly white.

3.

Listen, "Death to the Yanks, out with their dollars!"  
What revolution cares for poet-scholars?  
What price evasive private doubt beside  
The public certainties of Ayatollahs?

And every faction would find you a traitor:  
The country of the Rubaiyat's creator  
Was fired like stubble as we packed our bags  
And sought the province of its mild translator.

East Anglia!—where passionate agnostics  
Can burn their strictly non-dogmatic joss-sticks,  
And take time off from moody poetry  
For letters, crosswords, long walks and acrostics;

Where mist and damp make most men non-committed,  
Where both sides of most battles seem half-witted,  
Where London is a world away and where  
Even the gossips felt FitzGerald fitted;

He named his boat *The Scandal* (no misnomer . . .)  
And fished the coast from Lowestoft round to Cromer,  
One eye on his beloved Posh, and one  
On you or Virgil, Calderon or Homer;

Then wrote his canny, kind, retiring letters  
To literature's aggressive, loud go-getters—  
Carlyle and others I forbear to name  
Who had the nerve to think themselves his betters;

You were the problems (metrical, semantic)  
From which he made an anglicized romantic—  
The perfect correspondent for his pen  
(Inward, mid-century, and not too frantic);

As you are mine in this; it makes me really sick  
To hear men say they find you crass or merely slick;  
Both you and your translator stay my heroes—  
Agnostic blessings on you both! Sincerely, Dick.

## Welcoming the wasms

Peter Avery

A.F.L. BEESTON, T.M. JOHNSTONE,  
R.B. SERJEANT and G.R. SMITH (Editors)  
Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad  
Period  
547pp. Cambridge University Press. £37.50.  
0521 240158

The editors of this first volume in the new *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* mention R. A. Nicholson's *Literary History of the Arabs* kindly, and refer to H. A. R. Gibb's *Introduction to Arabic Literature* as another precursor, but, first published in 1907 and 1926 respectively, neither of those two works is representative of recent research. Nor, the editors suggest, are they sufficiently "extensive". Nevertheless, no one will think that this *History* is intended to replace Nicholson or Gibb. These new volumes will be compendia of chapters by different hands, devoted to topics in which each author is expert, and able, in the larger space the *History* affords, to be more detailed than Gibb in his short work, and to reflect ideas unthought of in Nicholson's day. Yet, given the length of time it takes to produce multiply-authored volumes which demand much editing (it is rarely ruthless enough), most recent research still eludes them, while an idiosyncratic selection of contributors sometimes excludes established if controversial authorities, as well as those established too late for inclusion. The problem of remaining up-to-date confronts any encyclopedia or reference work, but these *Histories* belong to neither category. They are, indeed, more "extensive", but fall between the reference book and monograph without the ease of access of the former or the rigour of the latter.

Their hybrid nature means that works like these are not intended exclusively either for other scholars or for lay readers seeking knowledge the easy way. In view of which, the scholarly authors have a responsibility that is inadequately discharged if sources are misrepresented. For example, the Prophet Muhammad is said (on page 29) to have remembered one of Qasbi Sa'idah's adages "by heart" from his "young days", when the source cited makes the point that he did not remember what the eloquent Christian said when he spoke so "sweetly" in 'Ukaz market-place. It was a man among his hearers who repeated the words for the Prophet. The incident is too significant to be imprecisely narrated. Another, not misrepresented, but insufficiently repre-



A group of strolling acrobats and musicians giving a performance in Tashkent in 1901, one of the illustrations in *Rugs & Carpets from Central Asia: The Russian collections by Elena Tzareva* (233pp, with 155 plates. Allen Lane with Aurora Art Publishers, London, £30. 0 7139 15048). The same publishers have also produced a companion volume, *Rugs & Carpets from the Caucasus: The Russian collections by Lina Kerimov, Norma Stepanian, Tatyana Grigoryeva and David Tsislavskii* (211pp, plus 124pp of plates. £25. 0 7139 15056).

sented matter occurs on page 22, when a passing allusion to the suggestion that one of the Bible versions Origen saw for his *Hexapla* might have been in a form of Arabic (*apud* Field's *Prolegomena* II, "Arabic Harethi") is made with no source reference and Origen is left out of the index. Another blemish, perhaps due to the decade or so between the writing of many of the chapters and publication, is that the section on the Quran fails to notice Wansbrough's important if provocative *Quranic Studies*, 1977, and Crone and Cook's *Hagarism* of the same year.

Suggestiveness is to be expected in such a volume as this, and it is never more suggestive than in R. B. Serjeant's chapter, "Early Arabic Prose". He has the advantage of being able to cite those present-day social usages that throw light on the most ancient. Also illuminating is his evocation of the function of the *kahins* or soothsayers in Arabia, in relation to language and law and to law's formulation in adages and saws. In this context *Ughli*, the "corrupter" or "diabolic", is several times mentioned, which makes the word's absence from the glossary

regrettable, especially as it is not quite clearly explained in the text, and is much used, though not well understood by westerners, in Khomel's Iran. Here Serjeant might have taken account of Wansbrough's assertions about the contrast made in the Quran between *a'jamlynn*, a non-Arabic or, as instances show, "devious" speech, and *arabiyun mubayyinun*, "a clear Arabic". Wansbrough provides a basis for the supposition that, in the Revelation to a Prophet always concerned to distance himself from soothsayers and poets, *a'jami* might have its established meaning of an outlandish rather than a foreign language: that is, a *kāhīn's* weird incantations as opposed to "a clear Arabic", the medium of the Quran.

The contributions to this volume vary greatly in quality, but it remains a major achievement overall. Some may feel it is too much in the tradition of an outdated Orientalism, but it is agreeably surprising to find a conservative scholar asserting masterfully, and without reference to more radical proponents of the same ideas, that to explore the origins of Classical Arabic, study of early documents in Chan-

How if my bosom friend, my beloved,  
my intimate, how sweet, if it were you.  
The answer is that the translation omits a passage to the effect that the poet saw in their midst an extremely beautiful boy. A little further, the Persian for "O boy!" is rendered as "My dearest friends".

Later on, in a translation of 'Iraqi's most famous poem, the Beloved is represented as feminine, contrary to the traditions of Persian lyric poetry. Statements about the beauty of a singer summoned at 'Iraqi's command, and the 'lostation' of the singer's admirers, are excised. In another story, we are told that a group of children were leading the great mystic by a string, but not (as in the text) that they were also sitting on his back. In yet another anecdote about 'Iraqi and some boys, a statement about his losing his heart to them is suppressed. A narrative in which he gazes at a shoemaker's boy is not one of the "translated portions".

Finally, we are told that after a Sultan ordered the governor of Damascus to organize a public welcome for 'Iraqi, all happened as the Sultan commanded, and the populace of Damascus greeted 'Iraqi with warmth. In fact the text alleges that the poet caused a scandal by throwing himself at the feet of the governor's beautiful son. (This anecdote is illustrated elsewhere in a miniature, which Basil Gray, in *Persian Painting*, 1961, interpreted to show 'Iraqi as "overcome with emotion at parting from a friend as he starts on a journey").

Dr Chittick and Mr Wilson say that in the *Divine Flashes* the author is discussing love as such, in all the forms it may take,

whether "mystical love" (man's love for God), "profane love" (man's love for woman or vice versa), "allegorical love" (*haq-i majazi*—love for God as contemplated within His Self-Manifestation in the form of woman), Divine Love (God's love for man and the creatures), "creaturely love" (the love of each creature for its own perfection), or any other phenomenon that may be properly called "love".

In the translation of the *Divine Flashes*, the Persian for "Necessarily He became identical with all things" becomes "He must Himself act every part". The translators twice make 'Iraqi say, in the same breath, that all is nothing and that all is God. "A great one" in the original becomes "a saint" (the concept of sainthood is alien to Islam). When an Arabic quotation states that God does not manifest Himself in one form to two people, the translation has "in two places".

Chittick and Wilson, in their presentation, are much concerned with the relationship between the *Divine Flashes* and a book which inspired it, the *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikm*) by Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), translated in the same series (*The Classics of Western Spirituality*). The reader may be puzzled by the statement that 'Iraqi's treatise "like the *Fihr*, consists of twenty-eight chapters". For there are only twenty-seven chapters in the *Flashes*. It might have helped if the translators had mentioned that in one of the oldest manuscripts the *Divine Flashes* also consists of twenty-seven chapters, as was observed by A. J. Arberry (*Classical Persian Literature*, 1967). It would appear that Chapter XI has been widdly divided, producing an extra heading.

## O boy!

Julian Baldick

FAKHRUDDIN 'IRAQI  
*Divine Flashes*  
Translated by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson  
178pp. SPCK. £7.50.  
0281 038678

This publication attracts attention by its treatment of a delicate aspect of Sufism, Islam's esoteric mystical movement: the practice of "gazing at beardless boys" in order to perceive the Divine Beauty therein. The Persian poet Fakhrüddin 'Iraqi (d. 1289) is celebrated as the most famous exponent and defender of this discipline. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson present, along with a translation and analysis of a short work by 'Iraqi in prose and verse (the *Divine Flashes*), an English adaptation of an anonymous medieval biography of the author, their handling of which overshadows the rest of the volume.

The translators say of the biography that "although tinged with hagiography, it accurately reflects the personality revealed in 'Iraqi's works". They also state: "In the translated portions of the life and in the more detailed sections of the text, we have used a somewhat freer approach."

The reader may wonder why the translation presents the young 'Iraqi as beholding a company of wandering dervishes, falling in love, and addressing verses to an evidently singular object of affection, beginning:

cery and commercial transactions is necessary.

In the immanence of the barren, windswept desert the utterance of the human voice was both the Arabs' art and their most cherished possession. From scratched or branded signs or wasms to the sophisticated works of the ninth century (an age of salvaging a threatened tradition), giving these utterances written permanence was a feat that excited the wonder of the Arabs as well as of their adaptable Persian imitators. Early Persian poets delighted in a script that marked the page "like chain-mail over a peeled almond". Arabs religiously respected the same alphabet. Apart from one or two slightly dubious initial remarks, the contribution on the "Persian Impact" to this volume is welcome; even if throughout it opportunities are missed fully to discuss the effects of Sasanid Iran's polyglot situation, and of restrictions on writing in fostering the development of Arab Letters.

A mercantile Middle East welcomed a wasm all might read. New egalitarian cities craved the poetic entertainment that had for so long been the history, wisdom and amusement of the Arab conquerors in their oases. A culture was born that still holds the hearts of millions. But these are the hearts of Arabs, and the reference is chiefly to a poetry that still lives on their lips, not to press literature which, in the period following that dealt with in this volume, is a memorial to every facet of the great civilization which coincided with, as well as instructing, that of the European Middle Ages. It is regrettable that a book meant to introduce this civilization to those whose experience of it has been limited should be marred by careless production, which initial slowness in editing made over-hasty. It is clear, on the evidence of this book, that editing such works cannot satisfactorily be accomplished on a part-time basis by an ill-co-ordinated team which might not enjoy the full confidence of the publishers. The book lacks both the uniformity one man might have imposed and the precision in detail publishers in less of a hurry would have ensured.

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## INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

### Old Rules, Dangerous Game

by L. CARL BROWN

(Garren Professor of Foreign Affairs and Director of the Programme in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University)

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## Flight from the hill

Michael Gilseman

HENRY MUNSON Jr (Editor)  
The House of Si Abd Allah: The oral history of a Moroccan family  
280pp. Yale University Press. £19.95.  
0 300 03084 3

"Why should I believe this?" is the awkward question anthropologists are constantly facing. What demonstration is there of the truth of an account of the often exotic Other beyond the account itself? Some writers give the rhetorically powerful reply that this is how they see themselves. But, comes back the innocent query, whose word am I to take for that?

One response is simple: theirs. Here are the direct voices caught and validated in the same moment by being "on tape", or written down verbatim. They are translated and edited to be sure, but published as near as can be straight from the informants' mouths. The somewhat ingenious appeal is at once to the grainy conventions of what Oscar Lewis (author of the best-selling *The Children of Sanchez*) called a new kind of literature of social realism, to the fascination of self-revelation and to the apparent reduction of the human recorder's role to being no more than a recorder and thus a guarantee of unmediated authenticity: let the speakers fact for themselves.

The voices in *The House of Si Abd Allah* belong to al-Hajj Muhammad, a pedlar living in the Jbala highlands of north-west Morocco, and his cousin Fatima Zohra, housewife and part-time university student in America. In separate sections each talks of the other thirty-nine members of the clan - from Si Abd Allah (d. 1932) to his grandchildren. The area they come from is an impoverished, peripheral one. Its people are mocked as hicks with charcoal dust in their ears, comically clumsy in Tangier where so many of them go to find work if the much sought-after visa for Belgium is too difficult to obtain. As the Hajj says, it is the shovel and pick in town, or making charcoal and evading the forest rangers in the hills. You can take honey and mint down to the city by donkey if you have one and if it does not break a leg on the narrow, treacherous paths. The rich have a vegetable garden or a few hectares of arable land on the plain, or town property in the poor quarters, frequently bought with money gained from migrant labour abroad.

The Hajj himself is Jack-of-all-trades and Jack-the-lad in one. When young he "wrecked the faces" of any European who slighted Muslims and was jailed for his presumption, as he was for farting three times "in the faces of the old Jews" praying in a synagogue. Independence in 1956 found him selling poppies from a pushcart, and getting on the wrong side of some of his former political allies. But he did obtain the precious passport. Driving a coal-

mine train in France was followed by a move to Belgium to work in a car factory, five years with a pneumatic drill, and stone cutting. Now in his early fifties he is back home living off casual smuggling, carpentry, house painting and hawking round the markets "the garbage of the Christians" for whom he has a resentful contempt. After nine wives and eight divorces, with no money, an only daughter most people think is not his and a spouse who "looks like a mule", Hajj Muhammad feels his age.

He has become a buffoon. He clowns, tells outrageous tales and mocks the interminable etiquette of Moroccan social encounters with an exquisitely polite "Did you shit today? How was it? Soft? Hard?" Yet he is also a self-made man of religion, stern upholder of what is respectable, denouncer of women's shameful conduct that leads men and has led him so often astray. Only the call to prayer really lifts his spirits, when depression weighs him down.

He becomes strange, says his cousin Fatima Zohra fondly. He talks fast and doesn't know what he is saying. She escaped to America and worked her way through college, marrying a graduate student who is now a lecturer. She shames much of her relative's view of Tangier and the highlands. It is a world where everything is precarious and nothing guaranteed. Money and property, painfully earned by both women and men cleaning or labouring for the Belgians and carefully invested in houses in Tangier, can be squandered by feckless, indulged, or scheming family members. Siblings and cousins compete to batten on you. They steal anything they can lay their hands on. Alternatively, they hoard up their *émigré* miser's wealth as the Hajj's younger brother has done and deny you the generosity and respect they ought to show according to the much invoked and seldom followed codes. The pauperized fawn on the enriched and insult them behind their backs in impotent revenge. Meanness of heart and soul is everywhere, but so is energy, impulsive openness, endurance and the capacity constantly to reinvent a life.

Unlike the Hajj, Fatima Zohra sees and detests the oppression and double standards of relations between men and women. Something in her approves of cousin Habiba who at sixteen ran off with a motor-bike and a young man and rode around in the show in black stockings and a clinging costume covered in gold spangles, had sex with any available man and now owns land and property in Tangier. Habiba does not neglect either to spend lots of money in the village on recitations of the Qu'ran.

Fatima Zohra's own flight to America was hardly less scandalous, but she invests sobriety in work, education and an American sense of family and future. Exasperated and critical of the predatory world of the Moroccan poor, she feels uneasy in the beautiful villa of a charming expatriate Englishman on one of her rare visits

back to Tangier. Madame Porte's "Salon de Thé" with its Westernized Muslims and nostalgic Europeans makes her guilty, but "I like the tea and I like the pastry."

In his fifty-seven page introduction Henry Munson Jr unfortunately feels obliged to identify the Hajj as a general type of "innately fundamentalist Muslim man" and Fatima Zohra as "westernized Muslim woman". Neither of these vacuous categories actually contributes to our response to and understanding of the narratives. Nor do I think that they in fact provide us first and foremost with a portrait of Islam, and a sense of the religious experience, as he asserts. This is the baleful influence of "Iran" on academics and publishers. Certainly Hassan al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, would be astonished to find himself here quasi-identified with the Hajj, with whom any likenesses are far outweighed by dissimilarities of social context, and individual class and cultural location. And

## Anglo-Arab attitudes

Bernard Wasserstein

CECIL HOURANI  
An Unfinished Odyssey: Lebanon and beyond  
209pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.95.  
0 297 78334 3

Born in the "Victorian dream city", the son of a Lebanese textile merchant, Cecil Hourani decided at an early age that his real home was not in the Manchester suburb of Didsbury but in his family's ancestral village of Marjayoun in south-east Lebanon. In his early twenties he struck out for the Middle East on a voyage of self-discovery, determined to locate his family's roots in the misty past of the Arabian peninsula, and evidently imbued with a sense that he had a special role to play in the evolution of a post-imperial Arab world. Thus was launched an adventurous diplomatic career, in the course of which Hourani worked successfully for the governments of at least four different countries and ploughed an idiosyncratic furrow through the wastes of Middle Eastern politics.

Three father-figures (though he does not call them that) loom large in this autobiography: first, Brigadier Ilyd Clayton, head of the British Intelligence outfit in Cairo to which Hourani was attached during the Second World War; second, Musa Alami, the Palestinian politician, under whose aegis Hourani served in the Arab Offices which acted as quasi-official representatives of the Palestinian Arab cause in various Western capitals during the decisive phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the period 1946 to 1949; and, third, Habib Bourghiba, whom Hourani befriended when the future Tunisian president was a penniless *émigré* in Washington immediately after the war. Hourani served Bourghiba for a decade as a special political adviser and later as head of a remarkable cultural centre, unique in the Arab world.

In each case Hourani tied himself not only to a personality but to a political vision: in the case of Clayton, to the concept of an Arab League, formed under British auspices, which would somehow achieve the central aims of Arab nationalism without expelling British political influence from the area; Alami's life (he died a few weeks ago) was largely devoted to securing a peaceful settlement of the Palestine conflict; what attracted Hourani to Bourghiba was his skill in combining nationalist rhetoric with diplomatic realism and the outward-looking style of his foreign policy which seemed as much Mediterranean as Arab. Hourani adulated years of suspicion and hostility on account of his links with these men - the daggers being sharpened all the more keenly as the dreams of each turned to dust.

In some of the more striking passages on Middle Eastern politics published in the West in recent years, Hourani recounts "from the inside" (as, not unjustly, he likes to say) the degeneration of the Arab League from the high ideals of the early days to the corrupt, pliant, and bureaucratic purposelessness which characterise it today. The attempt to reconcile Arab and Jewish nationalisms in

nothing is gained by labelling Fatima Zohra as a kind of American liberal Democrat. This is to blur understanding rather than to refine it.

Both book and characters are less and also more interesting than these claims. The family of Si Abd Allah does contribute to an and history of Morocco. It does give us some immediate sense of the experience of so many of the world's lumpen poor and *gastarbeiter*, and as such it belongs not only with the work of Oscar Lewis but with studies such as John Berger's *A Seventh Man*. It could have gone further, I suspect, if the structure had not been rather mechanically tied to the format of one person to be discussed per section, and if the world shared with Munson were made explicit. But even as it is, we do hear these fractured voices that have learnt to speak their own facts of the Jbala hills, Tangier slums, Brussels factories and American universities. They make the real claims on our attention.

Palestine proved similarly fruitless, though here Hourani played a courageous, if quack, role: first by inspiring Bourghiba's path-breaking initiative of 1965 (the first declaration by an Arab leader of willingness to accept the existence of Israel); and later in an article, published in the Lebanese daily *al-Nahar*, in the aftermath of the 1967 war - an article which aroused a furore because of Hourani's orthodox (but characteristically clear-headed) suggestion that rather than fighting Israel successfully every ten years the Arab world would be more likely to achieve its aims by allowing Israel to be, as it were, Levantinized from within. The third and personally most distressing disillusionment for Hourani was with Bourghiba's Tunisia. The notion of uniting Western cultural values, symbolized in the cultural centre founded by Hourani (with Bourghiba's initial blessing) at Hammamet, was perhaps bound to founder on the rock of a heightened, post-imperial nationalism (as, with hindsight, Hourani ruefully acknowledges).

Hourani's diplomatic career seemed to have ended in early 1967 with his virtual betrayal by Bourghiba. Returning to cultivate his garden in Marjayoun, Hourani found himself (where, one suspects, he most likes to be) at the eye of a storm. Marjayoun was one of the focal points of the Lebanese war and Hourani was involved willy-nilly. Many years earlier, unknown to him, his father had inscribed him in the official registry of the town, so that when he returned he found that he could "recover" Lebanese citizenship without applying for it. Rather like the bourgeois gentleman, he had been Lebanese all along without realizing it. Fortified by his newly confirmed national identity, Hourani, like many Lebanese over the past decade, found that his primary loyalty narrowed to his immediate locality. His first-hand account of the tribulations of Marjayoun and its vicinity through the grim years of warfare shatters many stereotypes and compels attention from those who want to understand what a crucial part of the war felt like "from the inside".

In its introspective analysis of the origins of his enthusiasm for Arab nationalism, this vivid memoir calls to mind an earlier exploration of Anglo-Arab attitudes - the late Edward Atiyah's *An Arab Tells His Story*. Though Hourani's is a more sophisticated sensibility, Hourani writes with panache and he paints an engaging self-portrait of a free-lance diplomat (half-participant, half-observer) criss-crossing the cultural and political junctions between the Arab world and the West.

*The USSR and the Muslim World: Israel, Domestic and Foreign Policy*, edited by Yacov Ro'i (298pp; Allen and Unwin. £25.00 301171 3) is based on papers given at a conference held by the Russian and European Research Center at Tel Aviv University in December 1980. Domestic matters are dealt with in Parts One and Two, while Parts Three discusses such foreign-policy issues as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia's attitude towards the Soviet Union in the late 1970s.

# FEW CHANNELS WOULD DARE SHOW ONE OF THESE, LET ALONE ALL OF THEM.



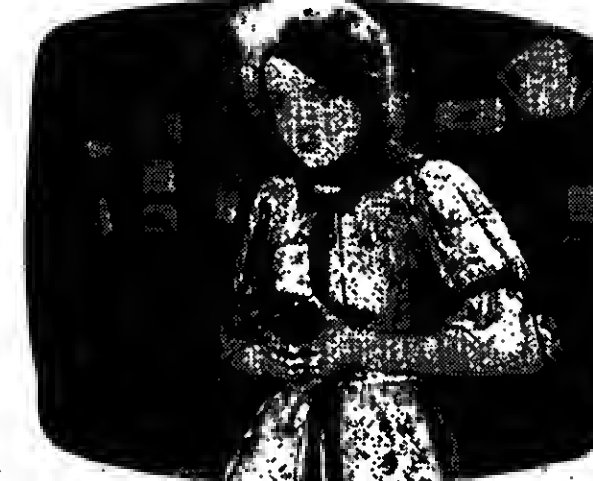
Wednesday 5th September. *Gloriana*. The English National Opera Company with their recent triumph in America; Benjamin Britten's spectacular opera about Queen Elizabeth I.



Wednesday 12th September. *Punch & Judy*. Harrison Birtwhistle's opera of desire and aggression, directed by David Freeman and described as "a vivid and violent post-Freudian melodrama".



Wednesday 19th September. *Satyagrah*. The first chance for British audiences to see Stuttgart Opera's controversial production of Philip Glass's hypnotic opera based on Gandhi's life and legacy of non-violence.



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Wednesday 24th October. *La Cenerentola*. Rossini's enchanting opera of Cinderella sensitively filmed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, starring the delicious Frederica von Stade.



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Wednesday 21st November. *The Mabynog*. A filmed pageant of Welsh Pre-Arthurian legends, set in Caernarvon Castle, featuring dancers, actors and local people. Music by Robin Williamson and Geraint Jarman.



Wednesday 28th November. *Starwashed*. The surreal cabaret and fringe theatre group "The People Show" appear with guest star Julie Covington, in a rueful fable of tattered vaudevillians.



Wednesday 5th December. *Puccini*. Tony Palmer's controversial film, starring Robert Stephens and Virginia McKenna, sets facts about Puccini's marriage against a backdrop of extracts from *Il Turco*.



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# With outstretched hand

Neil Corcoran

**PHILIP GROSS**  
*The Ice Factory*  
 62pp. Faber. £3.25.  
 0571 132170  
**SELIMA HILL**  
*Saying Hello at the Station*  
 48pp. Chatto and Windus / The Hogarth Press. £2.95.  
 07011 27880  
**IAIN BAMFORTH**  
*The Modern Copernicus*  
 48pp. Edinburgh: Salamander Press. £7.95 (paperback, £3.95).  
 0 907540 49 X

Philip Gross's poems are fascinated by gifts and offerings; they inquisitively inspect objects held out to them, and they are themselves, sometimes self-consciously, objects proffered to a reader. Some of their titles alone make the point: "Objet Trouvé", "The Gift", "Night-Offering". Other poems are plotted to culminate in the releasing of a gift: in "Ben's Shed", Ben extends a "clutch of dried corns . . . the past / and future sealed in them"; in "The Ice Factory", a letter arrives out of the blue with news of someone presumed dead long before; in "Appearances", a grief-stricken aunt grips a peach "as if to wring / from the pale downed flesh some common property, / something given, shared, a ghost of tenderness"; in "Ignis Fatuus", the poem itself acts elegiacally "like eternity, a Möbius strip (a trick / with paper, Bess, the least I can do)". Sometimes the gifts are unwanted: in "Objet Trouvé", "The Atlantic like a wild-haired dotty aunt / embarrasses us with her appalling gifts: / seals, whales, cows". And sometimes an ultimate human desolation is imagined as an empty-handedness: in "The Bone Ship", the ghosts of Napoleonic prisoners of war on Dartmoor "detach themselves and come / and come towards us, empty hands outstretched".

Gross's work, offers its readers some very immediate gifts. Its traditional metres and forms are never less than extremely well made, and incidental phrases have a memorable, and quotable, accuracy: "the Galapagos turtle, turned to stone / after a lifetime practising"; "the faint genteel ennuï / of the World Service". Occasionally, however, the gift can be too insistently offered; there is a certain strain in the way the object or occasion is made to release a moral or symbolic meaning. In "Blind Worm", for instance, a childhood game of hide-and-seek becomes too lush with sexual overtones to be believed; in "A Ring-side Seat", the child's reaction to circus midgets becomes almost risibly portentous and "sensitive"; in "The Curator's Tale", the quasi-Larkinian contemplation of lonely lives ends in what is little more than a sentimental cliché.

The danger of teasing and nagging things too insistently into patterns of meaning is apparent in an otherwise very fine poem indeed, "Vapour". The poem is again about an episode from childhood when the poet and a friend have been picking moths; and the details are handled with great descriptive deftness and rhythmic control. At the end, however, an almost hypersensitive delicacy of evocation — the moth's "finny filter of a wing / gold-dusted the glass" — is hyperbolized into yet another "end-of-innocence" poem:

"A moth, tonight? No, no, I couldn't name it, something gone between us, like our breath freezing, the night air."

It is not that this is not well done, but that it is almost too well done. The effects are so artfully managed as to seem stage-managed, and the painful experience vaporizes into only another opportunity for an exquisite simile and a delicate touch. The poem is too pleased with the meaning it has managed to extract from itself.

Gross's best poems are those where the inquisition of objects is less prey to the generalizing and moralizing imperative, and where the relationship with the reader becomes a kind of complicity in little dramas of sensibility and understanding. The attempt to compress a dramatic organization of his material into lyric form is apparent in Gross's handling of dramatic monologue. In his frequent use of reported speech, and in poems which employ only a single speaking voice — in his use of parenthetical

eses. These, a very marked feature of his manner, act ironically, or nostalgically, or in some other way as a dramatic response to the predominant tone of voice. Four whole stanzas of the long poem "Passages from Africa" are in parenthesis; and the marks of parenthesis on the page are a typographical confirmation of what the poem's grammar also makes plain: that the enormous distances between people can be bridged by words only with the greatest difficulty, and with a complex, responsive tact and scruple. The parentheses in Gross's work are a consistent interruption of any easy flow of communication; and the sense "Passages from Africa" conveys of the poem itself as a tentative verbal gift, hedged about by Lowellian dots and dashes of abruptness and disjunction, is an indication, perhaps, of the way Philip Gross's uneasily generous talent will develop:

This empty shell  
 of words returns the song to you —  
 though a cupped hand or tin can would do as well —

The hideously garish cover of Selima Hill's *Saying Hello at the Station*, one of the first of the new Chatto Poetry series, disguises a voice that is also tentative and unassuming. Her poems are about family relationships, particularly the relationship with a mother, and about the persistent attractiveness of spurious religious understandings of human life. The plangencies, poignancies and subdued eroticism of this material are filtered through a lonely private mythologizing, or fantasizing, and through what it is now conventional to call, as the book's blurb calls it, "narrative". Both the mythology and the narrative make great play with what has been recently a rather chic preoccupation, the archaeology and mythology of Ancient Egypt. The point about the cool, elegant poise of all this, however, is that it is always shadowed by something which is not poise at all, but panic, misgiving and disgust. The art with which those are kept in check gives the poems their characteristic edgy pathos.

Individual poems are so finely organized and integrated that it is impossible to quote them piecemeal. "The Fowls of the Marshes", however, the poem in which hello is actually said at the station, is entirely typical in its central relationship, its use of the Egyptian material, its self-deprecating, wary sadness, and its peculiarly dislocated effect of making the contemporary, not the historical, seem remote,

curiously deadened and flattened by weirdly detached humour:

Three thousand years ago  
 they were fowling in the marshes  
 around Thebes — men in knotted skirts  
 and tiered falcon collars,  
 who avoided the brown crocodile,  
 and loved the ibis, which they stalked  
 with long striped cats on strings,  
 under the eye of Nut, the goddess of the sky.

My mother's hushed peculiar world's the same:  
 she haunts it like the fowls of the marshes,  
 tiptoeing gaily into history, sustained by gods  
 as strange to me as Lady Nut, and Anubis,  
 the oracular, the jackal-masked.  
 When I meet her at the station, I say  
 Hello, Mum! and think Hello Thoth,  
 This is the Weighing of the Heart.

There is something of Stevie Smith in this, but Selima Hill is more calculating in her use of whimsy and more controlled, though certainly much less interestingly varied, in her rhythms. Her solipsism is just as desolate and convinced as Smith's, but also more casual and resigned. This doesn't stop it providing her, as it provided Smith, with many moments of sharp, satirical comedy — this, for instance, from "The Ram", where a very macho man is just stripped off to his socks:

Well, he says, d'you like it?  
 All I can think of is Granny,  
 how she used to shake her head,

when I stood by her bed on Sundays,  
 so proud in my soap-smelling  
 special frock, and say Ah,  
 Bless your little cotton socks!

Future editions of this sophisticated first book should note, however, that it is almost certainly "John Wayne" who should watch this confrontation from the bedroom wall: "John Wain" seems altogether out of place.

Iain Bamforth's *The Modern Copernicus* is a very odd book indeed, its penultimate poem, "The Art of Fuguo", is an elaborately baroque piece taking as its "themes" various phrases either from, or in some way associated with, Geoffrey Hill's poems. Readers not intimately acquainted with Hill's work will get nothing from the poem but some sonorous noises; whereas readers who are so acquainted may be astounded by the pointlessness of the exercise, and perhaps by its presumptuousness and rudeness. The shocks of recognition suffered by the latter kind of reader are of the

following order: "That proves synonymous the undiscerning dead" (Bamforth) is derived from lines in "A Pastoral" and "Metamorphoses" in *For the Unfallen* (Hill). The former reads "Prove synonymous our separated wrongs", the latter, "Those varied dead / the undiscerning sea". It will be noticed how the "thematic" epithet, "undiscerning", when transferred from "sea" to "dead", has the signal vice of not making nearly so much sense; and this exercise could be undertaken on every borrowing in Bamforth's poem, with similar results.

It might be objected that the poem's title at least prepares us for the performance. This does not, unfortunately, hold true for the rest of the book, which is also deeply indebted to Hill. One or two examples: for "each brief severance and attitude / Of death" in "Flowers Considered As Gestures", cp "the vivid severance of each day" in Hill's "Terribilis Est Locust Isti"; for "Blazing nocturnally against the light" in "The Modern Copernicus", cp "and your nocturnal blaze upon the day" in Hill's "Pavana Dolorosa"; for the title "A Little Requiem 1756-1791", cp Hill's title "Little Apocalypse: Hölderlin 1770-1843"; for the title "The Troublesome Reign" (which, in Bamforth, is actually a version of Baudelaire's "Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux", although it doesn't say so), cp Hill's title "The Troublesome Reign" (sic).

I am not claiming that Bamforth does not mean us to recognize these borrowings, versions and allusions; it seems only too clear that he does. But why? If one were not aware of this saturating influence, this, for instance, might sound relatively impressive:

The metaphor translates itself  
 From necessary and circumstantial pain:  
 Its tongue becomes my sacrament.

As it is, one's impression that it seems studied, artificial, mannered and second-hand is confirmed when one realizes that the metaphor in fact translates itself from Hill's "The metaphor holds: is a snug house" and "His sacramental mouth". To do a Bamforth on Bamforth: his poems exist in "a blurred, exquisite light"; their matter is so "hieratic, dimmed distress"; it seems extraordinary that so much energy should be devoted to something so derivative, particularly since derivation of his order demands a genuine sense of rhythm.

has been done by others, of course (by Edwin Morgan for one), but Arthur's pre-occupations are none the less amusing and at times poignant reflections on the idiosyncrasies of "morere" (as opposed to "metal poeure"). A.R.T.H.U.R. is followed by A.R.T.H.U.R. & M.A.R.T.H.A. or, *The Loves of the Computers*. Whether the joke of two computers falling in love (it will hold with my current) etc) is sufficient to justify a whole section is open to doubt, but the poems are never without a certain ingenious wit.

Lerner is fond of the extended series, and most recent volume, *Chapter and Verse*, comprises his personal versions of stories from the Bible, from Genesis through to "The End" (How will it end? With trumpets and explosions, / A cast of thousands, and the holy city / Sliding on well-oiled pulleys into view . . .). The same qualities that mark his *Selected Poems* — the humane wit and the self-effacing but craftsmanlike handling of language — make *Chapter and Verse* just as readable, but one can't help thinking of other contemporary poets whose excursions into the Good Book have produced more memorable poems: Charles Causley's "Ballad of the Bred Man" and the terrifying "Innocent's Song" for instance; John Heath-Stubbs's "The History of the Flood"; even Bob Dylan's "God said to Abraham, 'Kill me a son' / Abe says, 'Man you must be puttin' me on' / has more bite to it than Lerner's "The Test" ("Is it some joke I asked, / Some test, / Or what?"). Those, however, for whom such names as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stir only the most distant memories of Divinity O-level, will be happy to acknowledge a debt to Lerner for this reminder of riches contained in his great source.

Only their waves don't call

This playing with an alien perspective obviously looks forward to the computer poems of A.R.T.H.U.R. ("Selections from the work of the Automatic Record Tabulator but Heuristically Unreliable Reasoner"), but along the way there are monologues by articulate laboratory rats ("It takes intelligence to run a maze"), and laboratory monkeys and Kaspar Hauser. Giving computers "their say"

# Incontinent continents-full

Valentine Cunningham

**MICHAEL MOORCOCK**  
*The Laughter of Carthage*  
 602pp. Secker and Warburg. £9.95.  
 0 436 28460 X

In every way, with Dmitri Pyatnitski *alias* Pyat *alias* Peterson there's a question of endurance. The egregiously pompous, bragging, illiberal, ranting remembrancer of Michael Moorcock's *Byzantium Endures* now puts himself and his readers through an even more bloated self-resurrection in *The Laughter of Carthage*. Not Pyat the only one of the earlier novel's huge cast to get out of recently Sovietized Russia. With the boy hero and engineer comes Mrs Cornelius, Falstaffian cockney bad-mouther and mistress of all the top revolutionary brass. Once in western Europe Pyat soon comes across his old chum the aesthetic princeling Petroff, conspicuous among the hordes of White Russians thronging the Parisian bohemian scene. In Paris too, Tsipliakov the balletic bisexual is soon yearning once again for a touch or a sip of Pyat's flesh. Much more perturbing to Pyat, he thinks he glimpses his old adversary Brodmann tracking his every turn. The sinister Jewish Chikist/Bolshevik is bound, Pyat fears, to denounce him as a spy on one side or another. Pyat needs at least one of his former beloveds as well. His fiancée Esmé disappeared into the erotic squalor of the revolutionary mayhem, but in this novel Pyat recreates her in the person of a Rumanian tart he picks up in the cafés of Istanbul. Much of this narrative is about Pyat getting this second Esmé out of Turkey, through Italy, to Paris, and then scheming to transfer her to the United States.

Of course, for all the other old opponents who didn't make it through the Bolshevik terrors of *Byzantium Endures*, *The Laughter of Carthage* has hordes of ready replacements. For this epic writing, explicitly devoted to the memory of the crowd-mastering cinematic arts of D. W. Griffith. As Griffith stuffed his movies with vast throngs and Promethean matter so Pyat's narration feeds hugely on the numerous people he claims to have met, the history he makes believe he has helped to shape, the many places his traveller's tales take him to. Pyat's story snorts up continents-full of things with much the same eager roll as Pyat evinces for his daily doses of cocaine. Together, Pyat and his story will be big, bigger, biggest. Their joint ego swells with the names they casually drop. Dylan Thomas is Pyat's drinking comrade; other-loving Fascist Henry Williams (sic) admires Pyat's politics; Pyat meets Leon Blum, eats at the Pickford/Palbanks mansion, mixes with Tom Mix. His briefcase is always chock-full of plans for the vastest of flying machines. The stupendous airship hanger Pyat gets to build in France — like a medieval cathedral, he says — is intended at once to make his readers feel small and to aggrandize him. The 1920s, Age of the Machine, Pyat writes, has created its "finest symbol" in its "greatest hero": "the poet/aviator d'Annunzio". And, not surprisingly, "I saw much of myself in d'Annunzio. Together we could do so much."

The gargantuan sweep and hubristic excess of Pyat's story could not fail to be at least occasionally enticing — not least because Pyat's private variants on the post-First-World-War history we know better in other people's versions are so sexually engaging. If only school-books expatiated as freely on the contribution to world events of the brothels of Istanbul or the posh and puritanical bordellos of Memphis. But for all this uplifting attention to cosmopolitan low life, it remains the case that after two chubby volumes even Pyat's Rabelaisian charms are getting rather worn, and the more intrusive features of his recollections are making do with a fairly mundane fondness for mere lists of names, catalogues of things, Baedeker-like jottings, and joggings about Constantinople, Rome, Paris, New York, San Francisco, wherever. The self-praised poet of the modern concrete and steel city keeps turning, in the event, into a much more ordinary travelogueist, tripped out in the occasional purple patch — on Paris the queen of whores, it

might be, or the dream-factory of Hollywood. The would-be master of every contingency, the rider-out of a century's political storms is actually set on a peculiarly formulaic bout of journeyings, perturbed in the main by pretty predictable set-pieces, in an all-too-voluble run from Constantinople (for the Russian-Greek-Orthodox reflections that Byzantine churches will incite), to Italy (for its Futurists in politics and art and the motor-industry), to America (the land God gave to Griffith). Worse, Pyat stretches the reader's confidence in the truthfulness of what he lays claim to. Worse still, in the end he challenges one's tolerance, the readiness to put up with, to endure, the views he presses on one's attention.

The shocking contrast between this old émigré's boasts about his glorious past and the grotty shop, in the shadow of London's grim Westway, in which he is now writing is, of course, nicely managed to cast doubt on his textual and sexual endeavours. The question of how much of his story is fantasy, spliced together at the behest of mere wish, is intended continually to intrigue. If he was so great an inventive genius, how is it that none of his grand designs got off the ground? If he's so pure an Orthodox Christian, how did he get circumcised, and why does he speak Yiddish so constantly, and why do people keep taking him for a Jew? Moorcock contrives a number of these inconsistencies to help undercut Pyat's claim on political and social wisdoms. But Pyat is given stretch after stretch of rope and still doesn't get hung; instead he obsessively and endlessly picks at the scabs of some of the nastiest ideological sores English fiction has ever been subjected to.

For Pyat goes on and on about what's wrong with most of the human race — Jews, Bolsheviks, Catholics, Blacks, Turks, Marx, Freud, Einstein, almost everyone except himself, a few other faithful Russians, and a handful of white Protestant Americans. Pyat has soft spots for Hitler and Mosley (only Mosley's breath smells). He rhapsodizes over Mussolini and Senator McCarthy. He won't ever let us forget his private division of the world into Holy Russia, its Greek ideals, its brand of Christianity, its few supporters, on the one hand, and on the other the humdrum, semitic sod "philosemitic", aslatic, negroid, nigger-loving, blues-catowauling hordes of what he calls Carthage. White man let the Bolshevik-Hebrew-Moslem-Papist conspiracy overwhelm Byzantium, and now the West collapses into suitably terrible decline. Pyat has written to politicians, but in vain. He spends much of the period this novel covers stumping about America preaching to audiences of Klu Klux Klammen the virtues of hating niggers, yids, papists, and the good sense promulgated by Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, only to get into trouble with the FBI. So now he's turning on us, in page after page of extended, dismayingly unironic hate-laden rant.

To what end? This novel, like its predecessor, assumes that its protracted abandonment of stage-centro to this wicked crank will be of interest. Excuses or explanations are not thought necessary. "A genius of innocent vituperation", the blurb calls Pyat. But innocent is precisely what his vituperation is not. At best it might be just excusable as Swiftian — the granting of a hearing to immodest proposals that should be rejected by all sane readers. But the dearth of plying signals is as perturbing in Moorcock as it is in Swift. Pyat's "finest achievement (and that of his author)", the blurb-writer goes on, "is that his own warped and deluded vision is powerful enough to redefine reality". But which reality might this be? The reality of Hitler, or the Klan? It's an awesome thought that Moorcock might go along aven a bit of the way with Pyat's denunciations: that even one reader can take seriously such sinister monstrosity Moorcock has so vigorously spawned, even for a moment.

Robert McCrum will be at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1 to discuss his novel *The Rabelais Englishman* (reviewed on page 988 of this issue) with Nigel Williams on September 19 at 1pm. Other writers "in conversation" at the ICA this month include G. Cabrera Infante (with Mario Vargas Llosa) on September 11; Craig Raine, on September 20; J. G. Ballard, on September 27; and Gore Vidal on September 28.

# Northern exposures

John Melmoth

**DON BANNISTER**  
*The Summer Boy*  
 228pp. Heinemann. £8.95.  
 0 434 05055

*The Summer Boy*, the most politically forthright of Don Bannister's four novels, has little regard for the present administration, pre- or post-Falklands. In the North, the Tory landslide is regarded as an effete conspiracy centred on the Home Counties. Throughout Bannister's Yorkshire, the Prime Minister's parsimony about school milk has not been forgotten, while the prognostications of pro-nuclear bishops are received without rapture. Job centres are derided as a grotesque euphemism; nor does the insistence of "Hobbit or Rabbit" that joblessness is a shared concern meet with much enthusiasm. Contrary to the deeply-held convictions of the Treasury mandarins, the arcana of the money supply prove not to be the most immediate concern of the poor who, in any case, have their own solutions: "They should supply as much money as is needed."

Martin Morley, a twenty-year-old junior reporter on the local weekly, is ideally placed to ferret out insights into life north of Watford. From coverage of bring-and-buy sales, school fêtes and church parades he graduates to reporting the hundredth birthday celebrations of a dour Boer War veteran from whom he receives invaluable advice on how to succeed with women: "Put a stiff stick in their hand and then you cry." What he learns about the acceptable way of reporting court procedures — magistrates neither shout nor bully, they "speak emphatically" and "deal sternly with the accused" — reveals to him a special relationship between language and power. Promoted to features writer, he attempts to expose the chicanery behind the awarding of a local authority development contract. Indeed, much of the rest of the novel is devoted to exposing

the unacceptable machinations of the developers and their tame councillors.

In tone and atmosphere *The Summer Boy* reads like an update of *A Kind of Loving*. Like Barstow's Vic Brown, Martin is seen in the process of becoming knowledgeable about his family, his career and sex. In the course of a year, he builds an uneasy truce with a father who is unable not to resent his son's freedom of choice and action, fails to understand his elder brother and continues to favour his indulgent mother. He is forced to confront the limits of his own influence at work. Sexual experience is more readily and less traumatically available than it was for Vic Brown: nor does Martin scruple to maximize the benefits as he shuttles amiably between a willing librarian and an equally willing but less experienced radiologist.

The style of Bannister's novels resists classification — they approach a sound, commonsensical stylelessness. Like its predecessor *Burning Leaves*, *The Summer Boy* is successful through its realism, its directness, its absence of clutter. The fact that Bannister has made a virtue out of his readiness to confront the issues is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of the erotic episodes, which have an admirable straightforwardness. Otherwise, his prose effortlessly incorporates a number of good jokes, dialect, vulgarities, bawdy songs and comic set pieces.

*The Summer Boy* insistently suggests adjectives such as "robust". However, the sustained contrast between corrupt authoritarianism and the spontaneous affirmations of late adolescence does challenge credibility. Martin and his friends are rather remorselessly right-minded, have a shade too much North Country nous. Martin is just that bit too witty, soxy, articulate and self-analytical. He is not only nice to elderly lodges and polite to bus conductors; he also contrives to be sexually prodigal and simultaneously respectful of a woman's right to choose.

# Progress of the new man

J. K. L. Walker

**JULIAN RATHBONE**  
*Nasty, Very*  
 233pp. Michael Joseph. £8.95.  
 0 7181 24529

The condition of England today, Julian Rathbone reveals in his new novel, is not a happy one. Greed, ignorance, ruthlessness and vulgarity flourish, choking out the old liberal values. Seed-bed of the new order is the fictitious Loodon suburb of Woolingham where Charlie Bosham, the representative new man, has, in the thirty years since the Coronation, made his fortune in warehousing and, as the novel ends, is about to enter Parliament; the Conservative Party's gain is the country's loss.

Nasty, Very is ironically subtitled "A Mock Epic in Six Parts", each of which deals with a stage in Charlie's career. In 1953, at the age of fourteen, he is seen playing on the common with Terry Mead, his form-mate at Philip Sydney Grammar, and later with twelve-year-old Jane Coleman in the bathroom at 263 Goldsmith Drive where family and neighbours have assembled to view the Coronation on the Boshams' television set. Six years on, it is Doris, the office typist, gleam in gold Laurels, but Charlie, now a local estate-agent's clerk, is more interested in money than sex, lining his pockets with the proceeds of a privately set-up cyclotron, while also arranging a cut-price abortion for the rich and neurotic Lissie Mead. Three years later they meet again in Earl's Court and marry, only for Lissie to drive her Lotus Elan into a lamp-post, thereby supplementing Charlie's botched efforts to administer her as overproud. Charlie is relieved: no more glacial meals with the family, no more struggles for interval drinks at Covent Garden: best of all, a useful 1962-style £9,000 from the intestate Lissie to start the elvee (ie, non-union labour) converting air (ie, storage space) into money for him.

So Charlie takes off. Speaking passable Kerlington Posh when needed, yet with the

robustness, when provoked, to bite off half an ear in the scum (although less determined Old Sydneys edge him out of the team for this), he moves back to south-east London, builds up his warehouse business, is drawn into local politics through the crowd of the Leonine Rotatonists, marries again (after abandoning his secretary Valerie, whose insistence on orgasm he finds off-putting and taxing); this time, Coronation Day Jane and her two children by her first marriage. Flung into the wide world of consumer durables outside clothes, cigarette lighters and cars, Charlie follows the colour supplement trail gamely through thickets of stripped pino, past the flickering light of gas logs, to journey's end at Skorrit's Farm. Arm-twisting, back-scratching and worse carry his political career from local councillor to successful Conservative candidate at the 1983 general election.

Rathbone chronicles this man's progress without geniality. He is cool, clever and observant when it comes to such matters as eating habits, pub talk, sexual hang-ups and "Gotcha" patriotism. As so often in literature, the English lower-middle class emerges without credit. The moan-mindedness and deferential cliché on display at the Boshams' Coronation Day gathering is seen as flowering into grosser forms of materialism, more aggressive clichés; petty bourgeois apothecia agglutinate decline for the rest of us — those who got to Mojorca in the 1950s and were buying up (or rescuing from the stable-block) kitchen tables, while Charlie was still piggling it off Maples repro. The novel is good on such period detail, each of the six scenes carefully dressed with the right furniture and props. Charlie, however, despite Rathbone's fluent and vigorous delineation, doesn't quite come off. Strong on cunning, low on ideas and principles, he is too obviously set up as every good liberal's bogeyman, without a glimmer of charm to light up his monolithic crudity; mental laziness and ineptitude with women perhaps humanize him from time to time: is this really what the government back benches look like today?

John Melmoth



